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BY HAROLD PAYNE.

THE RIVERSIDE DRIVE DEATH-MYSTERY;

Or, DETECTIVE BURR'S LUNATIC WITNESS.



"JUST IN THE NICK OF TIME I JUMPED OUT, GRASPED ONE OF THE HORSES BY THE BRIDLE AND SHOT HIM."

The Riverside Drive Death-Mystery;

OR,

Detective Burr's Lunatic Witness.

The Story of the Tragedy of the Rocks.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

It was a few minutes after dark, and the promenade along the Riverside Drive had nearly become deserted.

This was due to a chilliness in the autumnal air that swept up from the broad Hudson, which spreads out a hundred feet below the drive.

At one point along this famous drive, between the promenade and the river-bank, arises a wall of rugged rocks, which are as grand in their primitive roughness as any to be found in the Alps. This extends for half a mile or more along the river front, and is a favorite resort for the people of the neighborhood, who delight to sit on the rocks and gaze at the magnificent panorama across the river, or look down into the blue depths of the Hudson.

At the time at which this story begins, as I say, the place was deserted; save for an occasional pedestrian wending his way homeward, as the shadows of evening thickened into gloom.

Among the few who chanced that way was a gentleman on the sunny side of middle-age, with a well-knit, athletic frame, and a firm but kindly face.

He appeared to be in no hurry and walked with the even, leisurely stride of a man who had time to spare and with nothing to do but enjoy his stroll.

He had reached a point just above Eighty-third street, and turned out of the path and climbed one of the ruggedest bits of rock to take a last look down at the dark waters before they had become obscured by the gathering darkness.

It was very quiet and he stood there gazing alternately across at the dark, towering Palisades and off at the silent waters, when suddenly he was attracted by the sound of what appeared to be a moaning voice.

He listened, but all had become quiet again. Still he listened, and presently he heard it again.

This time it was more distinct, and he could no longer have any doubt that it was the voice of a human being, and that, too, of a woman.

She appeared to be somewhere just beneath him, and he strained his vision in the vain endeavor to penetrate the gloom.

At length as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw, or fancied he saw, something white fluttering from the face of the steep crag, and at the same moment he heard the moan repeated.

He no longer entertained any doubt that some one was in imminent peril, and he determined to rescue her if it lay in his power. But how was he to do it?

How was he to reach the spot, which was so far below him, and the descent impossible?

After several futile attempts and the wasting of some time in trying to devise some plan to get down, he did what he should have done in the first place—went for assistance.

He had gone but a little way, however, when he was fortunate enough to meet a man driving a wagon. He at once appealed to this man for assistance, to which the teamster assented, and the two returned to the place, bringing with them a rope which the man had taken from the wagon.

The gentleman made this cord fast to a crag, but lest it should slip off, he charged the teamster to hold it on, after which he grasped the rope and slid down.

The distance was not great, and the rescuer was soon down to the point where he had seen the white object, and there a pitiful sight met his vision.

Dark as it had grown by this time, he could see what appeared to be a young and beautiful woman suspended from one of the

sharp points of jutting rocks, and he could also see that the face was stained with blood.

He touched the hand and found it cold and limp.

Without wasting time in useless investigation, he lifted the apparently lifeless form from the cruel crag with his disengaged arm and called to the man to draw him up.

The teamster, though a giant in strength, found this no easy task, for, added to the weight of the gentleman, was that of the woman; besides, the rope did not glide easily over the rough edge of the rock.

Nevertheless by tugging, added to the assistance the rescuer was able to give by bracing his feet against the side of the cliff, the sturdy teamster finally succeeded in bringing his burden to the top of the rock.

The gentleman laid his fair burden down upon the rocks and proceeded to examine her.

She was cold and limp, and there appeared to be no pulsation or other sign of life.

"I'm afraid we have arrived too late," he remarked.

"Is she dead?" asked the other, anxiously.

"She seems to be. You had better go in search of a policeman and have him call an ambulance. I will remain here and watch her."

"Why not put her in my wagon and let me take her to the hospital? There won't be so much delay about it."

"You are right. That is what we will do. But first, I will see what I can do toward reviving her."

"I don't think there's much chance of that," returned the teamster who had been stooping down examining her pulse.

Nevertheless the rescuer drew a small flask of liquor from his pocket and, pouring a few drops down the prostrate woman's throat and wetting her face with it, he proceeded to chafe her hands.

In a little while he was gratified to observe indications of returning consciousness, and finally she opened her eyes, but appeared too weak to speak, and soon closed them, again.

"Come, let us get her to the hospital as quickly as possible," urged the gentleman.

And, lifting the slender form, which was little heavier than that of a child, between them, they carried her and placed her in the wagon, after which the gentleman got in and took her in his arms. Thus she was conveyed to the Bellevue Hospital.

As soon as the patient was brought into the light it was seen that she was very young—probably not more than eighteen—and rarely beautiful, and her clothing indicated that she was a person of wealth and refinement.

The gentleman who had discovered her appeared to have some authority, for when the hospital people had dressed the young woman's wounds and had done all they could toward making her comfortable, he proceeded to make investigations with a view to discovering some clue to her identity and how she came by her injuries.

There were no marks of violence beyond two or three cuts on the head which had undoubtedly been received in falling against the rough rocks, and might have been inflicted by an accidental fall as well as any other way.

A well filled purse and the presence of several pieces of valuable jewelry on her person, precluded the possibility of the outrage having been committed for the purpose of robbery. With one exception, there appeared to be nothing missing from her person, and the rescuer was at a loss to know exactly what that one thing was, although it was presumably a locket, for a portion of a thin gold chain still clung to her neck, or rather it was tangled in the ruching about her neck and thus prevented from falling off.

The chain had evidently been broken, and the pendant, whatever it had been, had been torn away.

But, so far from furnishing any definite, or, as a detective would say, "workable" clue, this discovery only served to confuse and mystify the investigator.

The locket—supposing it to have been such—might have been a very valuable one, and being the most easily obtained of any of the victim's treasures, the thief had made one job of snatching it away and pushing his

victim over the cliff at the same time; or, the trinket may have had some historical value, been a family heir-loom or something of that kind, and out of revenge or for the purpose of establishing a false identity in order to get possession of other property, the wearer might have been lured to this lonely spot where her escort snatched it off and then had shoved her over the cliff. This would account for her being alone.

Again—which was as reasonable a theory as any—the locket might have been torn off by catching on a point of rock as the young woman fell.

Indeed, in the absence of any other marks of violence, this appeared to be the most reasonable theory, but if it was the correct one, the locket would doubtless be found in the vicinity of where the woman was discovered.

So, after completing his investigations, which did not result in either establishing the victim's identity or how she met her fate, the gentleman returned to the spot where he had found the woman an hour or so before, but, instead of going to the top of the rock, he took one of the paths leading down under the bluff until he came to the cliff on whose side he had found the woman suspended.

Here, with the aid of a dark lantern which he always carried, he began his search for the missing locket.

Scarcely had he flashed the light of his lantern over the ground, when he made one discovery. Not the one he sought, but still an important one.

It was a lady's umbrella.

There could be but little doubt about it having been the property of the injured woman, for it was lying directly beneath where she had been suspended, and doubtless had dropped from her relaxed grasp with the approach of insensibility.

The article also shed some light upon the mystery, for there was a name stenciled on the inside of the cover. The name was "Kate Sherwood."

Of course this did not reveal much. There was nothing to show who Kate Sherwood was or where she lived. Still, the searcher congratulated himself on having something to work upon, and went on with his search for the missing locket.

In this he was not so fortunate, however, for, although every inch of ground was gone over, not a vestige of either the trinket or the broken chain could be found. He even flashed his light over the face of the cliff.

About twenty feet from where he stood a bit of white stuff still fluttered in the breeze, which indicated the point at which the woman caught, but no glistening object, which would indicate the presence of a jewel, caught his keen eye.

After an hour spent in this fruitless search, the man abandoned it and returned to the hospital to ascertain the condition of the unfortunate woman.

She had already passed away!

"It's too bad," observed the kind-hearted nurse, "that a purty gurrel loike hur sh'u'd doie without aven knowin' who she was. She probably knowed enough o' the wur-reld, though."

"What do you mean?" asked the gentleman.

"I m'ane that she was wan of the class that's betther out av the wur-reld than in it."

"What makes you think so?"

"She was too well dressed for a poor gurrel, and a rich dacent wan wouldn't 'a' been at such a place alone at that toime in the avenin', d'ye moind?"

"You may be right, but I am loth to believe it. She hasn't the appearance of a woman of the kind you mean."

"Och, sure, an' it's moighty haird to tell thim from the dacent gurrels nowadays."

"Did you find nothing about her to reveal her name or where she lived?" asked the gentleman, anxious to switch the old woman off her favorite topic.

"Yis, here's a handkercher wid the name 'Mrs. O. Stern' on it, but there's no address."

"Mrs. O. Stern?" mused the man. "That does not correspond with my discovery. Either the name on the handkerchief or the one in the umbrella is not her own; or, what is still worse for my theory, the umbrella did not belong to her at all."

Then another thought occurred to him. Perhaps the girl's assassin was a woman, and this was her umbrella?

The suggestion thrilled him, for in case there was anything in the theory, this would prove a most valuable clue.

With the advice to the hospital people that they had better lose no time in notifying the police, the gentleman left the place, and, engaging a cab, had himself driven with all haste toward the residence of Superintendent Byrnes.

Half an hour later he was closeted with the great detective.

"Well, Thad Burr!" exclaimed the superintendent, as the noted detective entered the room, "what brings you here at this time of night? I know it cannot be a friendly visit."

"No," returned Thad—for the great special it was—"and yet I trust there will be nothing unfriendly about it. The fact is, superintendent, I have made a find to-night."

"A find?" repeated Byrnes, growing interested; "what was it? a diamond pin, or a purse with a cool million in it?"

"Neither. A woman!"

"It is not difficult to find them, and not go far either," laughed the superintendent.

"But, this was a dead woman, or so nearly dead that she expired a little while after reaching the hospital."

"Any indications of violence?"

"Yes, and no."

Thad then went on to relate in detail the circumstances of the discovery of the unfortunate woman, and concluded by saying:

"What do you think of it?"

"Well, as you say, she may have come to her death through violence, and it may have been merely an accident," replied the superintendent, thoughtfully.

"Or suicide," suggested Thad.

"Or suicide," assented Byrnes. "The fact of her being alone would seem to suggest that theory."

"But the absence of the locket upsets it again."

"So it does; and that of an accident, also. Still, it is possible that some one else may have found the locket before your return to the spot."

"That is hardly likely, for, if you know the location of the place you must know that there is not one chance in five hundred that any one would pass that way at that hour of the night, and if they did, it is not likely that they would discover the locket in the darkness."

"You are right, Thad, as you usually are. Then the theory must stand for murder. Have you made any other discoveries, such as would suggest a clue?"

"I have made a couple of discoveries, but I do not know whether they will lead to anything or no."

"What are they?"

"One is an umbrella with the name 'Kate Sherwood,' and the other is a handkerchief with the name 'Mrs. O. Stern.' The umbrella was under the rocks and the handkerchief was on the girl's person."

"Ah! That looks like a clue, my boy! What is your theory in connection with it?"

"That the girl's name was Mrs. O. Stern, and that Kate Sherwood was her murderer."

"A good theory in the premises. Go on and work it," said Byrnes.

CHAPTER II.

THE FATAL CHARM.

AFTER leaving the superintendent's house Thad called at the Police Headquarters to see if the case had been reported, and also whether any inquiry had been sent in from the missing woman's friends.

The report had been sent in from the hospital, but no inquiry had been received. The latter showed that, supposing the woman to have any friends in the city, they had not yet missed her, or at least if they had they had taken no steps thus far toward finding her.

The detective's next move was to examine the City Directory for the two names, Stern and Sherwood.

He found plenty of Sherwoods, among

which were two Katherine Sherwoods, but as one was a laundress, and colored, and the other a midwife, he was satisfied that neither of them was the woman he wanted.

He next looked for the name Stern, and found two whole pages of them, and one of them was Oliver C. Stern.

"That is my man," mused the detective. "Ten chances to one he is the husband of the young woman, and if he is, I have made some progress, anyway."

According to the Directory the person in question resided on Columbus avenue, and, as it was but a little past eleven, Thad concluded to call upon him that night. A Sixth avenue Elevated car took him to Eighty-first street, from which it was but a few steps to the house.

In response to his inquiry, he was told that Mr. Stern was at home and was ushered into the parlor, where he was soon after joined by a portly gentleman of sixty or more.

Thad's first impression was that he had failed to strike the right man after all.

"Surely this old graybeard cannot be the husband of that beautiful young girl," he mused.

Then he thought that possibly this might be the father of the girl's husband.

Thad decided that frankness would be the better course in this case, so, after introducing him, he began at once:

"You will be surprised, Mr. Stern, possibly grieved—when you learn my business."

The old man looked startled.

"Why, what on earth?" he exclaimed.

"Pardon me," interposed the detective. "Before we become alarmed, let us see whether there is any cause for it. You will excuse me for appearing inquisitive or impertinent; we detectives are apt to appear so."

"Go on, sir," implored the old man. "Please do not keep me in suspense."

"Well, then, let me ask you whether you have a wife or not?"

"Why, what a strange question," ejaculated Mr. Stern, staring at the detective.

"Certainly I have."

"Young?"

"Why, good gracious! What are you trying to come at? Yes."

"How young?" continued Thad, in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone.

"Let me see. Why, just nineteen to-day, I gave her—"

"Was she pretty?" interrupted the detective.

The old man was more astonished than ever.

"Was she pretty?" he echoed.

"I mean, is she pretty?" said Thad, correcting himself.

"Very pretty. In fact, she was considered—"

"Is she at home at present?"

"No, sir. She went up to Newburg this afternoon, and will not return before to-morrow. Why do you ask all these questions, sir, may I inquire?" demanded the old man, a trifle testily.

"You are sure that she went to Newburg, are you, sir?" pursued Thad, disregarding the other's question.

"Why, yes; at least, that is where she told me she was going."

Thad was silent.

He was now satisfied of two things. One was that the dead woman had been the wife of the old man, and the other was that he knew nothing thus far of the tragedy.

He was at a loss how to proceed. How should he break the news to the venerable husband? It was necessary in order to learn what he desired to, and he steeled his heart against sentimentality, and said:

"It pains me to tell you, sir, but I see that you have heard nothing of the terrible calamity which has befallen your young wife, Mr. Stern."

The old man sprang to his feet and his face became livid with anticipation.

"Calamity?" he gasped. "What—"

"Be calm, sir, I beg!" implored the detective. "Sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

The old gentleman sunk mechanically back into his chair, and still continued to stare wildly at Thad.

The latter then related the circumstances of the discovery, together with the removal

of the young lady to the hospital, where she had subsequently died.

Mr. Stern was stricken with grief.

"I will not trouble you to answer any more questions at present," said Thad in conclusion. "You will want to look after the remains of your wife. But, as it will be necessary to investigate this matter, and you, above anybody else, can give me the facts I require, I would like to ask you to grant me another interview, say to-morrow afternoon."

"Very well, sir," replied the sorrowing man, the tears streaming from his eyes. "Call to-morrow afternoon at about four, and I will see you."

"That will do, thank you. I shall be here. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir, and a thousand thanks for bringing me this news, sad as it is. It is far better that I should know it to-night than to have it come upon me through the shocking medium of the newspaper in the morning. Good-night, sir, and God bless you!"

Thad then took his leave and left the old man to his grief and the grievous duty of having his pretty young wife brought from the hospital to his home.

As there was no more he could do that night, the detective returned home, but put in several hours after reaching there in figuring out his course in the case he was about to begin upon.

The following afternoon, in accordance with his appointment, he again called at the residence of Mr. Stern.

The house was in mourning, but the old gentleman soon put in an appearance and took the detective to his private library where they would run no risk of being disturbed, and the old gentleman took the additional precaution of locking the door.

"Now, Mr. Burr," he began, as soon as they were seated, "it will probably be as well to begin with my telling you a little about ourselves."

"It will be the proper thing, indeed, Mr. Stern," assured Thad. "It will give me a chance to draw my deductions with more certainty and greater ease."

"Well, in the first place, I want to tell you that my family consists of two sons and one daughter at present. My wife died ten years ago, and I had remained a widower ever since until three months ago, when I concluded to marry my second wife."

"Were any of your family opposed to the marriage?"

"Yes, they all were."

"But they finally became reconciled, I presume?"

"Yes, all except Leonard, my eldest son."

"And he did not?"

"Apparently not. You see, Leonard was already betrothed to Kate—"

"Ah?"

"Her name was Katherine Sherwood before she was married," explained the old gentleman.

Thad's heart sunk.

One of his theories was knocked in the head already—the one that the girl's murderer had been a woman, and that her name was Kate Sherwood.

"How did it happen that she married you, when she was betrothed to your son?" asked Thad.

"Well, there were several causes for it. In the first place, Kate always thought a good deal of me—as a father until recently (you see, I raised her as one of my own children,) and in the second place, she got jealous of Leonard on account of something she had heard about him (he had been doing business in Chicago for a year or so) and they had quarreled; and lastly, she was influenced by an aunt who had an eye to money, and thought that Kate would do better in a financial way by marrying the father than the son."

"Has Leonard been in the city lately?"

"He was here yesterday."

"Do you know whether he and your late wife had any words or not during his stay?"

"Not that I know of."

"When did he leave the city?"

"Some time during the afternoon."

"You are sure of this?"

"Perfectly, for I saw him to the depot."

"That precludes the idea that he might have been instrumental in killing her, anyway," decided Thad.

"Yes, even if it were possible to suspect such a thing, which it is not. Leonard is too kindly and noble-hearted for that."

That appeared to put a quietus to all of the detective's theories and he was for the moment at a standstill.

Finally, however, he thought he saw a way out.

"You told me last night," he resumed, "that your wife left here with the alleged purpose of going to Newburg. Did anybody accompany her?"

"No, sir. My daughter accompanied her to the Elevated station, and would have gone to the depot with her, but Kate preferred to go alone, and my daughter returned to the house."

"What time did your daughter get back to the house?"

"About a quarter after four."

"You are sure of this?"

"Oh, yes, because we discussed the probability of Kate reaching the depot in time, and I remember consulting my watch and saying that it was then just a quarter past four."

"And she did not leave the house afterward?"

"No. We were going to the theater, but some friends came in, and she remained at home."

"Of course you have no idea why your wife changed her mind and did not go to Newburg, Mr. Stern?"

"None in the least."

"The fact that she was found so near here would seem to indicate that she had gone, by appointment, to the place where she was found, and the fact of her refusing company to the depot appears to point to the fact or theory that she desired to deceive you and prevent you from knowing where she was going."

The old man was silent for some moments, but finally said:

"So it would."

And then, after another pause:

"What would you infer from it all, sir?"

"Either that she was lured to the spot by some designing person who had succeeded in inducing her to deceive you in order to get away, or else that she had made up her mind to take her own life."

The old man shook his head.

"I cannot entertain either theory, sir," he replied. "Kate was a perfectly pure-minded girl, which would preclude the first theory, and her surroundings were too cheerful and she herself was too well contented to admit of the theory of suicide."

"You may be right in your last hypothesis, but the fact of her being lured away by some designing person does not necessarily imply that the person in question was a man. Women are often as designing as men, and are as fiendish in carrying out their schemes of revenge."

Mr. Stern's countenance cleared.

"Oh," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I did not know but you might have thought that she was mixed up with some—"

But here he checked himself, and after a pause concluded:

"No, Kate was too pure a girl to be implicated in anything unworthy."

Again the detective appeared to have come to the end of his tether, but almost immediately after two points occurred to him at the same moment.

"You say your family consists of three children, Mr. Stern," he resumed, "two sons and a daughter. Is your youngest son at home?"

"No, sir," replied the old gentleman, "Norman is away at school."

"This is all the family you ever had, is it?"

"No, sir, I had another son, Harper, but he is—"

The old man paused and an expression of the deepest pain overspread his face.

"Dead?" suggested Thad.

"N—yes—dead."

By which the detective inferred that he was nothing of the kind; but, as the subject was clearly very painful to the old gentleman, he did not pursue it, and merely said:

"Too bad."

Another pause, then another line of investigation was attempted.

"On examining the body of your wife for evidences of how she came by her death, Mr.

Stern," he went on, "I discovered the fragment of a slender gold chain about her neck, which appeared to have supported a locket or some other similar trinket, yet which had evidently been snatched away or broken off in some other manner. What was the trinket?"

The old man shuddered and turned pale at the mention of the article in question.

"That," he finally explained, "was what has been known in our family for generations as the 'fatal charm.' It is an old-fashioned locket, and belonged to and contained the portrait of a female ancestor. It has rarely been worn by any of her descendants, but in each and every case where it has been worn, some dreadful calamity has befallen the wearer. It was kept among the rare old family relics and had not been worn by anyone for several generations, but the moment Kate saw it and heard its history, she was seized with a burning desire to wear it. I would never consent to it, for, although I am not given to superstition, so many misfortunes had followed the wearing of this particular piece of jewelry, that I dreaded to risk allowing any one near and dear to me wearing it. But, yesterday was her birthday, and nothing would satisfy her but I should give her this locket as a birthday present. She made so lightly of my apprehensions and laughed so much at my superstition, that I finally consented to her wearing it, and you see the consequences."

Thad could hardly suppress a smile at the old man's superstitious awe of the simple bauble, but he contrived to preserve his gravity, and continued:

"But you remark that the jewel is now missing. Can it be that any person who knew of its fatal character could have desired to possess it enough to take your wife's life in order to get it?"

"I cannot tell. I should not think that any one, knowing its history, would care to possess it at all."

"And yet, unless it possessed considerable intrinsic value, I can hardly imagine a common thief committing murder to possess it, and at the same time leaving his victim's purse and other more valuable jewels untouched."

"It had no intrinsic value to speak of. It was a plain gold locket with the arms of the family engraved on one side and the words 'Fatal Charm' on the other. The latter was put on after its fatal nature had been tested."

"Have you any objection to my looking through your late wife's effects, Mr. Stern? I mean her trinkets, letters, and the like."

"None whatever," he replied after some hesitation.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CLUE.

AFTER a little reflection as to how he should proceed, Mr. Stern arose, and motioning the detective to follow him, passed out of the door and tiptoed along the hall to another door, which, being unlocked, he opened and stepped in.

As the old gentleman closed the door and locked it Thad took occasion to look about the apartment.

He found himself in a fair-sized room off of which an alcove opened and contained a bed, and both apartments were furnished in the most dainty and sumptuous style.

In one corner stood a rosewood cabinet richly inlaid with ivory, and, without a word, the old gentleman walked over and opened this, displaying a number of small drawers and pigeon-holes, and then turning to the detective, said:

"You will find most of her trinkets in here, sir. She has a few more over there in that other cabinet, which you may go through if you like after getting through with this one."

"Thanks," returned Thad, and at once set to examining the contents of the cabinet. He found no end of odds and ends, such as would interest a young girl, but there was an entire absence of the very thing he sought, namely, letters.

Meanwhile the old man had seated himself at the opposite end of the room and sat staring vacantly out of the window, apparently absorbed in deep meditation.

Finally—and it had taken him nearly an hour—the detective completed his task of going through the contents of the first cabinet, and arose.

"Well, sir, I find nothing here," he observed. "It begins to look as though this case was destined to remain enshrouded in eternal mystery."

The old gentleman shook his head gloomily, but made no reply, and arose wearily and opened the other cabinet.

"See what you can find there," he observed, and returned to his seat again.

Thad began the examination of this second cabinet's contents with less hope than he had the other, for he did not expect to find any more here than he had in the other place.

However, he was agreeably disappointed.

The very first drawer he attempted to open he found locked, although all the others were unlocked.

This aroused his hopes, for the fact of its being locked led him to believe that it held some secret which the owner of the cabinet did not wish any one to know.

He communicated the fact to the widower, who appeared to be greatly surprised at it.

He arose and approached the cabinet, and after looking at the drawer steadily for some seconds, gave a little pull at the knob.

Finding that it would not come open, he said:

"It is locked, and must remain so."

"Why?" demanded the detective, impatiently.

"Because there is but one way of unlocking it."

"How is that?"

"By means of the Fatal Charm."

Thad could hardly suppress his merriment at what he imagined another exhibition of superstition, in spite of the annoyance he experienced thereat, when the old gentleman checked him by continuing:

"You see, this cabinet was made by the same person that made the locket, and the latter can be used as a key to unlock this drawer."

The detective was as much in the dark as ever, and still more out of patience.

"I don't see how this drawer can be unfastened by a locket," he muttered.

"It cannot be unfastened by it," explained the other, "but it can be used as a key to the problem of opening it. I will explain: This drawer is locked by turning this little knob a certain number of times. It may be locked by turning the knob three times, ten times or fifty times. Whatever the number is, it must be turned backward exactly the same number of times. Now, one is apt to forget the number with which he locked it unless he makes a memorandum of it, and if he makes a memorandum it is liable to be lost, and here is where the charm's usefulness came in. As many times as you turned the knob of the drawer you turned the stem of the locket, which caused a hand to move around and register the number."

"But as the locket is missing, and the key to the mystery of your wife's death may be locked up in this drawer, why not try some other means of opening it?"

The old man shuddered and turned pale.

If the detective had suggested going down-stairs and cutting out the dead woman's heart with a view of discovering some hidden mystery there, he could not have appeared more shocked.

"Horrors!" he cried. "I wouldn't have you do that for the world!"

Thad lost his patience.

"You do not want the secret of your wife's death solved then?" he exclaimed.

"You prefer to have the mystery remain a mystery, and the probable victim of a horrible murder rest under the stigma of a suicide, rather than fly in the face of a foolish superstition?"

The old gentleman was greatly affected.

He clearly saw the wisdom of Thad's words, but there was evidently something so sacred or awe-inspiring about the drawer which had been locked by a number, and that number recorded by the Fatal Charm, that the thought of tampering with the lock was absolutely shocking to him.

He remained silent for some moments and he appeared to be undergoing a terrible struggle with his conflicting emotions.

"Yes," he finally replied, "I would rather

that the mystery should remain unsolved than that drawer should be *forced* open. Understand, I have no superstitious dread in the matter, but the fact that she locked the drawer at all, and especially with the Fatal Charm, convinces me that it contains some secret which she considered sacred, and it would be sacrilege for me to tear it open and expose it, now that she lies cold and helpless in death."

The detective arose in disgust.

"In that case, there is but one thing for me to do, Mr. Stern," he observed, coldly, "and that is to abandon the case where it is."

"So be it, then!" rejoined the old man, in a sorrowing tone. "I should like you to proceed with the case, but I cannot help my feelings."

"It will not be necessary to discuss the matter further," retorted the detective, somewhat indignantly. "You have made up your mind, and so have I, and there's an end of it. I might mention this fact, however," he pursued, after a pause, "that if I relinquish the case, the superintendent will put somebody else upon it, or the regular police force will take it in hand, and I can assure that they will have very little regard for your feelings."

"They will not dare to break open that drawer, will they?" demanded the old man, in alarm.

"They will dare to do anything, sir. There is nothing sacred to them, when a great mystery like this is involved."

The old gentleman hesitated and seemed on the point of weakening, but his firmness finally prevailed, and he started for the door as an indication that he considered the interview at an end.

Thad now saw that he had blundered; he should have used stratagem with the old man, instead of frankness.

He was thoroughly interested in the case and did not want to give it up.

As he passed from the room and down the stairs he racked his brain for an excuse to get back and examine the contents of the cabinet he had just left.

But they reached the lower hall without his having arrived at anything, and he was about taking his leave, when a door opened and a tall, handsome young lady entered the hall and approached the old gentleman with a smile.

"Papa," she said, "this is the detective you spoke to me about, is it not?"

"Yes, dear," replied her father with a puzzled expression.

"Has he made any discoveries?" she asked quickly.

"N—no. That is—"

"Might I have a word with him?" she interrupted.

The old man looked more puzzled than ever, but after glancing from her to the detective and back again, he finally answered:

"I can see no objection, although Mr. Burr has abandoned the case. Mr. Burr, this is my daughter, Josephine."

Thad bowed politely and the girl extended her hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Stern," he said.

"If you will walk this way," she observed disregarding his politeness, "I will tell you what I have to say. Excuse us, papa."

And before either Thad or the old man had time to think, she opened the door from which she had just emerged and motioned the detective to enter.

As soon as he was inside she closed the door, and then turning abruptly upon him, began:

"Papa objected to your opening the drawer in the cabinet, didn't he?"

"He objected to my *forcing* it open," rejoined Thad, surprised that she should have known what had transpired in the room upstairs.

"There is no need of forcing it," pursued the girl.

"You have the number with which it was locked, then?"

"Yes."

Thad was about to tell her to give it to him at once that he might go up and open the drawer, but thinking of his withdrawal from the case, he said:

"I wish I had known you had it before I abandoned the case."

"But you are not going to abandon the case?" she pleaded.

"I do not see how I am to do otherwise now. I told your father that, inasmuch as he refused to let me open that drawer which I believed to hold, if not the secret, at least a clue to the secret of your step-mother's death, there was nothing left for me but to withdraw from the case. He expressed his regret at having me take such a step, but rather than yield the point, he was willing that I should do so. So you see I am committed."

"Never mind about that. Papa entertains a sort of superstitious regard for that old cabinet, as well as the locket they call the Fatal Charm—fatal nonsense!" she cried with a little laugh.

"You evidently do not take much stock in the Fatal Charm business, then?" smiled the detective.

"No more than I do in the pin you wear in your scarf. The chances are that you may receive a bullet while wearing that pin, and in that event, you would be as much justified in calling it the Fatal Charm as papa has in calling that ridiculous old locket a fatal charm. But, never mind. You go on with the case, and I will tell papa that it was at my urgent request you altered your mind and continued on."

"Very well; I shall do so, as I am greatly interested in the case, and I know that if some one else is detailed to work it, he will cause you a good deal more trouble and accomplish no more than I will."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried the girl, "because I know you will discover the secret of this thing. I just know it by your looks. Here is the number that the drawer was locked with," she went on, handing him a slip of paper on which was written in Roman numerals, "XIX."

Thad took the slip and, wondering how she came in possession of it, asked:

"You are sure this is the right number, are you?"

"Yes, I am positive."

"How do you know so positively?"

The girl stamped her foot impatiently and made a wry face.

"Oh, you detectives are so inquisitive!" she cried. "However, I'll tell you. I had promised to go to the station with Kate, and as she hadn't come down when I was all ready to go, I ran up-stairs to see if she was ready. I opened the door without knocking, as I often did, and she was just closing the cabinet, and then, picking up a pencil, she hastily scribbled this on the paper and attempted to put it into her pocket, and I guess she thought she had done so, but she hadn't, for it dropped upon the floor where I found it afterward. I cannot be mistaken for I know that she always put the number in Roman numerals like that."

"Very well. Even if you should happen to be mistaken, there will be no harm done, so if you will accompany me, we will go up and make the experiment."

Then the girl turned and left the room, and was followed by the detective.

Thad was gratified at not finding Mr. Stern in the hall when he emerged from the room, and, following his fair guide, he softly crept up-stairs.

When Josephine, who was in the lead, reached the cabinet, which still stood open, she turned and waited for the detective to come up.

"Turn the knob to the left," she said, when he had reached the cabinet. "It would seem the most natural to turn the other way, and that is probably the reason it was made that way."

Thad examined the knob and noticed that there was a nick in one side and that immediately above it a thin strip of brass was inlaid, by which it was possible to calculate when you had turned the knob clear round.

"You have been used to operating this," remarked he, "suppose you do it?"

"Not for worlds!" ejaculated the girl. "I want nothing to do with it. I gave you the number, and if you cannot open the drawer, it will remain closed."

"All right," laughed Thad, "but it is surprising how you could have had this secret and not opened that drawer. You certainly haven't the usual curiosity of women."

"Oh, ordinarily I should have opened it

and had a peep into it, but I believe that drawer to contain things that I want somebody else to find instead of myself."

"I wonder how she came to use the number nineteen," mused Thad as he prepared to turn the knob.

"Yesterday was her birthday, and she was just nineteen," explained the girl.

"Ah, I see! Then you had additional cause for thinking that this was the key to open the drawer?"

"Yes; as soon as I recalled the fact that it was her birthday and that she was just nineteen, I knew this was the open sesame."

Thad began to turn the knob, and each time it came round to the strip of brass he would count.

The girl watched him intently and also kept tally.

At length he reached nineteen and he heard a soft click.

Pulling gently on the knob, he was gratified to find the door came open.

He glanced at the girl, and saw that she was very pale and her eyes were staring wildly.

Another moment he lifted a package of letters from the drawer, and he took off the very topmost one, and prepared to open it.

"I knew it!" cried Josephine. "That is it! I knew it was there! My God!"

And the girl placed her hand over her heart, staggered back and sunk into a chair.

Thad glanced at her, and in the waning light he could see that, although she had not lost consciousness, she was as white as death and appeared to be breathing with difficulty.

"What is the matter?" asked the detective, approaching her.

"Nothing, nothing!" she gasped. "Read the letter. That will explain all."

CHAPTER IV.

THAT TELL-TALE LETTER.

TAKING the young lady's advice, Burr extracted the letter from the envelope and carrying it to the window in order to get better light, read its contents as follows:

"DEAR KATE:—

"Meet me on the rocks at the foot of Eighty-third street and North River at five o'clock this afternoon. If you still entertain the love for me that you claim you do, you will not refuse this last interview—for it is the last I shall ever ask of you. What I wish to say to you, as you know, cannot be said at the house, and I choose this time and place for the reason that I know father and sister will both be at home and there will be no danger of discovery. Make some—any excuse to get away from the house; say that you are going out of town or somewhere, and do not fail me. I cannot write more now. Hoping and praying that I may meet you at the time and place mentioned, I remain, as ever,

"Your devoted but discarded,

"LEONARD."

When he had finished reading the letter, Thad raised his eyes to Josephine and found her intently regarding him.

"Now you see, sir," she observed in a scarcely audible voice, "why I did not want to open that drawer?"

"You knew it was in there, then?"

"I had good reason to believe it was."

"You must have seen your brother writing it."

"No, but I saw Kate receive it."

"Did it come by mail?"

"Yes, and must have been written and posted very soon after my brother left the house."

"But you appeared to have known its contents?"

"Not a syllable."

"Pardon me, but what caused your agitation a moment ago when you caught sight of the letter?"

The girl, who had grown calm again, was taken aback at this unexpected question, and became a little confused. But she quickly regained her composure and replied:

"I could guess pretty nearly what the letter contained by Kate's actions while reading it."

"You saw her reading it?"

"Yes."

"Were you in the room with her?"

"Not exactly, but—I saw her," she faltered, reddening considerably.

"How did she act?"

"She became very nervous, grew red and pale by turns, kissed the letter, and finally burst out in tears. A little while afterward she came to my room and told me she was going to Newburg and would not return before the next day. I did not believe her, and that was the reason I wanted to go to the depot with her. I was satisfied the letter had something to do with her going out, and was anxious to see where she went. And when I insisted upon going she got angry with me, and I knew then that there was something wrong."

"Did you know that the letter was from your brother?"

"Yes, I knew the handwriting."

"But your father says that your brother went to Chicago early in the afternoon."

"That is what father supposed, but Leonard did nothing of the kind. It was all a concocted scheme between them to meet without our knowing anything about it."

"What could your step-mother's object have been in pretending that she would not return until the following day? She could have met your brother and had her talk with him, and then returned home the same evening."

"Certainly she could, but that is one of the mysteries you will have to clear up. I can never do it."

"You knew something of the relations of your brother and your late step-mother?"

"Something, yes."

"He was very fond of her, I presume?"

"Yes; I think he loved her."

"And she?"

"I know she was passionately fond of him."

"Of course your brother was greatly grieved at your father marrying her?"

"Yes, sir; he took it very hard."

"Is your brother of a revengeful spirit?"

"I have never seen any exhibition of it. On the contrary, he was always rather too forgiving for his own good."

"There are cases, Miss Stern, where the sudden shock caused by blighted affection like that unsettles the reason and changes the mildest-mannered person to a vengeful fiend. Now, did you notice anything unusual about your brother's actions during his stay?"

"Nothing, except that he appeared a little down-hearted."

"Which was not characteristic of him, eh?"

"No, sir; his disposition was the most sunny and cheerful of any one I ever met."

"You could not imagine, then, that the melancholy over his disappointment could have led him to commit an act of violence?"

"No, sir; I could not think of such a thing."

"And yet you do not doubt that your brother met the woman at the appointed time and place, do you?"

"I do. My theory is that, while my brother, fired with the recollection of old love, or stung with the wrong which had been done him, planned the meeting, he afterward thought better of it and did not meet her, and that she either became the victim of some footpad, or, becoming piqued, perhaps desperate, at her disappointment, threw herself over the rocks."

"But you said awhile ago that you did not believe your brother went to Chicago at the time he claimed to have gone."

"I do not."

"Why?"

"Because the letter to Kate was mailed at three, and he was supposed to have taken the train at two-thirty."

"Still he might have posted the letter as he went to the depot."

"Impossible. Papa was with him and says that he did not mail any letter on his way."

"You spoke to your father about it, eh?"

"Yes. Besides, if you will notice, the stationery is such as he would have got in one of those stationers' where you can purchase a sheet of paper and an envelope and are furnished with pen and ink to write your

letter on the spot. We have nothing like it about the house. I am positive."

When the detective got down-stairs again the old gentleman was waiting for him in the hall.

He looked at Thad curiously, and asked:

"Well, sir, has my daughter been able to shed any light on the mystery?"

"Not much," was the reply.

Thad hesitated about telling him that he had succeeded in getting into the secret drawer; but the old man saved him that trouble by asking:

"You did not get into that drawer, did you?"

"I did," answered Thad firmly.

Mr. Stern's face took on an expression of horror.

"What, against my injunction?" he demanded angrily.

"Yes, and at the earnest request of your daughter."

"But my daughter, sir has nothing to—"

"Oh, yes, she has, papa!" came the voice of the girl directly behind them.

Both men looked up and saw Josephine standing on the lower step of the stairs.

"It was no fault of Mr. Burr's, papa," she went on. "It was I that ordered him to open the drawer, so if there is anybody to be scolded, scold me."

"But my dear, you know that I would not have had that drawer broken open for any amount of money," protested the father.

"Nor would I, and that is the reason we did not break it open."

"But you said just now that you had opened it."

"So we did, papa."

"Then how—?"

"Let me explain," she interrupted. "You see, papa, I had the number that the drawer was locked with and knowing that it contained the key to the mystery of Kate's death, I was determined that the detective should open it and discover the mystery."

"And you have discovered it?" he almost gasped, turning to Thad.

"Not exactly, but what I have discovered may lead to it," replied Burr.

"What is the discovery?" asked the old man, growing greatly agitated.

Thad glanced inquiringly at Josephine.

She nodded assent.

"He may as well know it now as any time," she said. "He will know it some time."

Turning to the old man, he asked:

"Do you think you are equal to a great shock, sir? If not, I had better not show you this."

"Do not keep me in suspense, sir," insisted Mr. Stern. "I am ready for the worst. What is it?"

"Mind, there may not be anything in this," pursued Thad, as he handed him the letter. "I myself believe it to be a false clue. At least I hope it may turn out such."

The old gentleman perused the letter, and to the detective's surprise, he did not exhibit as much agitation as he had at the announcement that the drawer had been opened.

After reading the missive, he coolly folded it and handed it back with the calm observation:

"As you remark, it is a false clue. My boy has never been guilty of either luring Kate away or—"

He hesitated, and then continued:

"It is false, sir. You may depend upon it. My son never had anything to do with it."

"You do not deny that he wrote the letter, do you?"

"If he did not, it is a very clever forgery; nevertheless, there is something behind this all. I do not pretend to be able to explain what it is, but, when the mystery is sifted to the bottom, I am convinced that you will find that Leonard had nothing to do with it."

"I hope so. But I would like to have you do something for me," returned Thad.

"What is that, sir?"

"Telegraph to your son at Chicago. See whether he is there or not, and if so, when he arrived. He will not suspect anything, and most likely tell you the truth."

"I have already telegraphed the news of Kate's death."

"Have you received any reply?"

"Not yet."

"Does not that look strange?"

"No, because I did not telegraph till this afternoon, and he may not have been at his hotel at the time the telegram arrived."

"Did you request him to come on to New York?"

"No. I took it for granted that he would."

"What time did you send the message?"

"About two o'clock this afternoon."

"What time did he leave New York yesterday?"

"At two-thirty."

"Then he ought to have reached Chicago, everything favorable, at about three this afternoon. It is now within ten minutes of seven," pursued the detective, consulting his watch. "He ought to have been in Chicago three hours ago and, it is natural to suppose that he would go to his hotel by this time, so that we ought to have a reply to your message pretty soon."

Thad had hardly ceased speaking when the door-bell rung, and the next minute the servant brought the old gentleman a telegram.

"Here it is now," he observed, as he tore the envelope open with a nervous hand.

He merely glanced over the message, and then covering his face with his hand, handed the paper to the detective.

It read as follows:

"DEAR FATHER:—

"I have just this instant arrived, and received your dispatch, with sad news of Kate's death. Will leave at once for New York. LEONARD."

Thad reflected a moment, and then said:

"This is extremely favorable for your son, sir."

"Favorable?" groaned the old man.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he must have left New York not later than five o'clock."

"You mean seven o'clock. It only takes twenty-four hours to go to Chicago."

"True enough. But you must remember there is a difference of over an hour in the time between here and Chicago. Allowing that he reached there in just twenty-four hours after leaving here at five, it would be five o'clock here and six o'clock there. Then it would have taken him some time—say fifteen minutes—to reach his hotel, and allowing that he might have been detained on the way, it might have taken him thirty minutes. That would make it half past six. Then there was the reading of your message and writing his, the transmission from there here, and finally the time it took the messenger to bring it from the telegraph office, which, supposing everything to have been done with the greatest expedition, would make up the other half hour. So you see that your son could not have left New York later than five o'clock, and could not, therefore, have had time to meet your wife at Riverside Drive after you left him."

The old man's face lighted up as though he had received a heavenly revelation.

He looked as though he could have hugged the detective.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he cried, grasping Thad by the hand. "You have lifted a great burden off my mind! I know now that my son is innocent of any complicity in this affair, notwithstanding this letter, which seems on its face to condemn him."

"Yes, this appears to clear him of all suspicion. Let me see: he ought to be here some time to-morrow afternoon. I will call and see him with your permission, Mr. Stern."

"I shall be most pleased to have you meet him, Mr. Burr," rejoined the old man.

Thad then took his leave, and after doing so, made his way once more to the scene of the late tragedy, Riverside Park. He did not hope to make any new discoveries, but somehow his curiosity led him in that direction.

He had reached the identical spot, and again climbed the rocks, on the face of which he had discovered the unfortunate woman.

He stood there meditating upon how the poor girl could have met her fate, and was impressed with the loneliness and stillness of the place, when, all at once, he became aware that there was some one at the bottom of the cliff.

It was intensely dark, but he could, nevertheless, discern the outlines of a human being moving about below.

He watched for some time, and the person appeared to be walking about in a circle as if he were searching for something.

At length, as much out of curiosity as suspicion, the detective decided to find out about the mysterious person, and to that end walked along the rocks to a place where there was a path descending to the foot of the cliff, and there climbed down.

A few moments' rapid walk brought him to the spot where he had seen the person, but he had disappeared.

Thad approached a little nearer, and then, all at once, the person came out from behind a jutting rock.

It was too dark for the detective to discern him accurately, but he could see that it was a man, that he was bare-headed and that his clothes were in ribbons, as though he had been running through a thicket of thorn-bushes.

The moment he caught a glimpse of Thad, he turned and ran at the top of his speed. Indeed, so sudden and unexpected was his action, that he succeeded in making his escape before Thad thought of pursuing him.

CHAPTER V.

THE DARKENED LIFE.

It was a minute or so before Thad recovered from his surprise at the strange appearance and conduct of the mysterious man, and when he had, he was convinced that the fellow had something to do with the tragedy of the previous evening.

He therefore determined to follow him, with a view to learning what he could about him.

The man had taken a down town course, and apparently kept the path leading along the foot of the cliff.

Thad knew that if he kept that course he would be compelled to go the distance of a block or more before reaching a point where it was possible to climb to the roadway above; so he took the same course, and hurried on as fast as the rough, uneven state of the path would permit.

After stumbling along for the distance of nearly a block, it occurred to him to light his lantern, and, taking it from his pocket, he put a match to the wick.

Having done so, he shot the slide and threw the light upon the narrow, rugged path.

He had no more than done so when he was astonished at a discovery he had made.

There was a trail of blood along the white pebbles of the path, and, what was still more astonishing, the blood was fresh!

What could it mean?

Had the fellow, finding that he had been discovered, attempted to take his own life to escape prosecution.

If he had, the detective argued, he had not been very successful, for there was no great amount of blood, only a drop here and there, and had more the appearance of having come from an accidental wound, such as might have been received from running over the rough rocks with the bare feet.

This theory was soon afterward confirmed, or nearly so, when he began to see clearly-defined footprints traced in blood, and they were that of bare feet!

Burr was more than mystified; but, as he recalled the wild look of the man, and the tattered state of his clothing, and saw by the bloody tracks that he was barefooted, the detective was satisfied that the fellow was a lunatic.

Then the light of a new theory dawned upon him: this lunatic had probably been the perpetrator of the outrage which had resulted in the death of Mrs. Stern!

But, allowing that such was the truth, what had been the circumstances—the impelling motive?

Had it been a mere mad freak, or was there a story behind it?

Perhaps he had been an admirer of Kate, and she had rejected him, which had driven him mad. Perhaps, in times gone by, they had strolled along the rocks, and, escaping from confinement, he had naturally wandered back to the old rendezvous. By the merest chance he had come along while she

was there, awaiting the arrival of Leonard Stern, and the sight of her rendering him violent, he had sprung at and hurled her over the cliff.

Or, possibly, at sight of the locket, which recalled something he had seen in his days of sanity, he attempted to obtain possession of it, and had accidentally forced her over the precipice, in the act.

As these various theories flashed through his mind, the detective was pushing on in the course which the bloody footprints indicated the seeming lunatic had gone.

Finally he came to the first cut in the cliff, where a natural stairway ascended to the upper level, and for a moment the track had disappeared, but when he had climbed part of the way up the steep ascent, the traces of blood again appeared, and he knew that the fugitive had gone that way.

A few moments' toilsome climb brought him to the top of the cliff, and again the track had disappeared.

He threw the halo of his bull's-eye over the ground and searched diligently, but to no purpose; there was not the least trace of blood in any direction, and he was finally compelled to give it up.

On the opposite side of the road from the river are still some of the primitive rocks, rough, rugged and wild as they were when the Dutch first settled on the island.

Perched away up on these rocks a few of the squatters' cabins still remain, inhabited by the poorer classes.

For some reason it occurred to Thad that the lunatic might have sought shelter in one of these; so he at once climbed the rude stairway which the squatters have constructed to get up to their humble abodes.

There was a light in the first shanty he came to, and the detective knocked at the door.

The knock was promptly answered by a robust Irish woman, who demanded in a surly voice what he wanted.

"I want to know whether you have seen anything of a crazy man about here," replied Thad.

"A man wid his clothes all tore and bare-headed?" inquired the woman.

"That's the man."

"Yis, he's been about here these two days back. He come here lasht noight all covered wid blood, and said some wan had throid to kill him."

"What did you do with him?"

"Sure, phwat could Oi do but take him in an' let him wash himself an' give him a boite to ate an' a place to shlake?"

"So he remained all night, did he?"

"He did that."

"Then where did he go?"

"He wint nowhere all day till this avenin', whin he shlipped out an' Oi haven't seen him since."

"Was he bareheaded and barefooted when he came here last night?"

"He was not. He had on his hat an' shoes, but his clothes was all tore. He shlipped out this avenin' afther we'd made him go to bed, an' Oi s'pose he hadn't toime to put an his shoes or anything but his trowsers."

"You knew he was a lunatic when he first came to you, didn't you?"

"Sure, anny wan would have knowd he was as crazy as a bedboog, by the looks av his eyes, which was that would they'd freighten the loife out av yez."

"Why did you not notify the police, then?"

The woman looked at him in horror.

"Whoy should Oi do that?" she snapped.

"So that they might have taken him into custody."

"Faix, an' whoy should they take the poor divvil into cushtody? Phwat had he done?"

"You cannot tell what he had done. He might have murdered some one for aught you know. Besides, he is probably an escaped inmate of some of the lunatic asylums, in which case it was your duty to see that he was taken back there."

"Och, sure, an' if he was the inmate av anny o' thim places it's mesilf that'd nivver do annything to git him back," she retorted, with a toss of the head.

"Why?"

"Because they're no place for a dacint person to be."

"Well, if he comes back here to-night, will you be good enough to send word to this address?" asked the detective, handing her his card.

The woman took the card, and after glancing at it, threw it back at him, with the reply:

"Sure, an' Oi will *not*! It's a detective or wan av thim asoylum chaps ye air, an' Oi'd see yez dead befoer Oi'd give yez any information about a poor divvil that yez want to confine!"

Thad saw that it was but a waste of time talking to her and bidding her good-evening, walked away.

He inquired at the other two shanties which stood upon the rocks, but the inmates had seen nothing of the lunatic.

He then pursued the only course open to him, which was taking up his station within view of the first cabin with the purpose of watching for the approach of his man.

He took position near the foot of the stairs leading to the top of the rock, so that no one could ascend without his seeing him.

It was about nine o'clock when he took this station, and many weary hours passed without anything worth mentioning occurring.

One or two belated residents of the shanties came along and climbed the stairs, whom the detective could see between himself and the sky, but they were unable to discern him in his dark hiding-place, and that was all.

Midnight finally passed, and still no sign of the lunatic.

Thad was about ready to abandon the vigil, when he was attracted by the sound of a stealthy footstep, which was so light that if the night had not been unusually still and he had not been listening intently, he would not have noticed it.

At first he could see no one, as the approaching person, whoever it was, kept in the shadow of the rock.

He waited and listened.

At length, after a long time he espied a figure glide out of the shadow, approach the foot of the steps and start to mount.

It had taken but a few steps upward when it came out in bold relief against the sky, and the detective saw that it was his fugitive by the tattered raiment that blew about him.

For an instant Thad was at a loss what to do.

His first impulse was to rush upon the man and capture him, but on second thought he deemed it the better plan to wait until he had got into the shanty toward which he was evidently tending. But the detective had no more than considered this plan when he thought of the bitter denunciation of the police and asylum authorities by the old woman, and he knew that it would be next to impossible to capture his man if he once got inside her shanty, so he finally decided to steal upon the lunatic quietly and take him before he was aware that he was being pursued.

With this aim in view he stole out of the shadow and started up the steps, but had scarcely taken three steps, although they had been as light as those of a cat, when the lunatic's acute ear must have caught the sound of his approach, for he turned, espied the detective, hesitated an instant and then bounded back down the stairs past Thad like a flash of lightning, and was gone before the shadower knew what had happened!

It did not take Thad an instant to realize the situation, however, and he made off after the fugitive at the top of his speed.

The madman was a swift runner, though, and, spurred on by some superhuman energy, flew along like the wind.

Thad also was a swift runner, but, in spite of his utmost exertions the fellow steadily gained on him.

The madman had taken the middle of the driveway, up-town, and before very long had so distanced the detective that he was out of his sight.

After awhile Thad felt himself becoming exhausted and slackened his pace, but kept on in the same direction.

He had run perhaps two blocks after losing sight of his man when he noticed a group of persons at the side of the road, and they appeared to be struggling with one another.

A few moments' run brought him up with the struggling group, and he then discovered that it consisted of two policemen and the madman, whom they were trying to overpower and he was giving them all they wanted to do.

Without a word the detective lent his assistance and the lunatic was soon overpowered and handcuffed.

It was not until then the officers appeared to notice that any one had come to their assistance, and they stared at Thad in astonishment.

"You appear not to know who I am," observed the detective. "Well, as you have rendered me an important piece of service, I don't mind telling you. You have heard of Detective Burr, I presume?"

"Detective Burr?" echoed both officers in a chorus. "Not the great—"

"Detective Thad Burr," interposed the man-taker.

"Mr. Burr, I am glad to know you," exclaimed one of the policemen, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment.

"And I too," added the other officer.

"I am always glad to meet one of the boys," said Thad calmly. "But, let us get this poor fellow to some place."

"Yes, we will call a patrol wagon," rejoined one. "But, who is he, anyway?"

"That is more than I can tell, though I suspect that he had something, if, indeed, not everything to do with the killing of the woman found hanging on the rocks last night."

"No, no, no! It was *not* I!" cried the poor lunatic, who had become calm and had been listening attentively to the conversation since the irons were put on him. "It was *not* I. It was—the—the—man with the black mustache!"

"By Jove! there is something back of his ravings," remarked one of the policemen. "Look!" he went on. "See this cut on his head. That has not been made long."

"That is where he struck me," murmured the lunatic. "He tried to kill me—tried to murder me, but I fought, fought, fought! Ha! ha! ha! But—but he killed her! He threw her over the cliff, and the horses went over too."

"Who did this?" asked Thad in a kindly tone.

"The man—the man with a black mustache."

"Who is he?"

"The man with the black mustache," repeated the madman. "Oh, my head!" he groaned, putting his manacled hands to his head. "He tried to kill me! But I fought, fought, fought! Ha! ha! ha!"

And the poor fellow broke out in a wild, hilarious laugh.

"There is no use of questioning him now," observed Thad, turning to one of the officers. "Let us get the ambulance as soon as possible and take him to the hospital."

One of the men hurried away, leaving Thad and the other one to look after the lunatic, and in the course of twenty minutes an ambulance came lumbering up.

The poor fellow was induced to enter the vehicle, which he did without much persuasion, and was driven away to Bellevue Hospital.

It was found upon examination that, while his skull was not fractured, there was a depression caused by the blow he had received, which, the doctor thought, was sufficient to produce the symptoms of insanity he exhibited.

He was in a sorry plight when they got him to the hospital.

In addition to his tattered clothing, his feet, which were bare, were cut and lacerated from running over the rough stones, and he was in a high state of fever.

The few remnants of clothing remaining on him were of fine texture and appeared to be new. Besides, there was a diamond stud in the remaining fragment of a shirt he had on and two or three valuable rings on his fingers.

But, to the consternation of the detective and hospital authorities, there was nothing about him to establish his identity.

And Thad's theory about his being an escaped lunatic was knocked in the head by the articles of jewelry found upon his person.

Thad was compelled to formulate a new theory, and he was not long in doing it.

It was in part that there was some significance if not truth in the words uttered by the poor fellow, when he said that some one had tried to kill him, and he believed that this somebody was the murderer of the girl.

CHAPTER VI.

GROPING IN THE DARK.

On the following day Thad again called upon Mr. Stern, and found that his son Leonard had returned.

It was late in the afternoon, and the family had just returned from the funeral of Kate.

The old gentleman met the detective and, taking him aside, said:

"I want you to have a talk with my son. I had thought of doing so, but could not make up my mind to speak to him under the circumstances. I do not believe him guilty, but I do believe that he knows more about the affair than he cares to tell. You are the one to get it out of him."

"All right, sir," rejoined Thad. "It was with a view to having a talk with the young man that I called this afternoon. I presume it will be best to be frank with him."

"What do you mean?"

"I had better let him know who I am."

"Certainly. There can be nothing gained by disguising matters. He is a sensible fellow and, if he has taken the trouble to think about it, he must know that there is room for suspecting him. Shall I call him down?"

"If you please."

Summoning a servant, the old gentleman dispatched him to ask his son to come down, which he soon did.

After introducing Leonard to the detective, Mr. Stern made some excuse to leave the room, and the two men were left alone.

Leonard Stern was a tall, handsome young man of possibly twenty-four, with a frank, manly face, and Thad could not help wondering what the inducement had been that impelled Kate Sherwood to sacrifice him for his father.

The father had introduced Burr as a detective, and the young man appeared a trifle nervous when left alone with the detective, and the latter, noting this, was somewhat at a loss as to how to begin with him.

But the great detective was not long in making a start.

Coming to the point at once, he began:

"I presume it has occurred to you, Mr. Stern, that, under the circumstances, you might be suspected of having something to do with the late tragedy?"

The young man became greatly confused, and it was a minute or two before he could reply.

"It has occurred to me," he finally faltered, "that unthinking people might connect me with the affair, but I do not apprehend that any sensible person will harbor the thought for a moment."

This, the detective could not but recognize as a master-stroke. If the young man was guilty, and studied out the answer he was to make to such a question, he could not do better.

While he could not help but think that the remark was that of an innocent man, Thad realized that it might possibly be a subterfuge and determined to act his part regardless of appearances.

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend," he interposed. "Of course every thinking person hopes that you are innocent of any complicity or even knowledge in the matter, but that is not saying that those same persons will shut their eyes to appearances."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that, innocent though you may be and as I hope you are, so far the evidence is against you and no one else, and it may be necessary for you to make some explanations."

Leonard turned pale and grew very nervous.

"I don't understand you," he said. "I cannot imagine how there can be any evidence against me."

Thad took the letter he had found in the cabinet and handed it to him.

"You doubtless remember writing that?" he observed.

The young man colored at sight of the letter and his hand shook so that he could scarcely hold the paper.

"Where did you get that?" he finally gasped.

"It matters not where I got it. I ask you whether you wrote it or not."

"Ye—yes, I wrote it, but—"

He hesitated, and the detective interposed: "Well?"

"It had no reference to the late tragedy," Leonard answered, in an almost inaudible voice.

"How am I to know that?"

"Kate refused to comply with the request."

"You mean that she did not meet you at the intended rendezvous?"

"I mean that she refused to do so, and I did not go to the rendezvous to see whether she would come or not."

"She told you she would not comply?"

"Yes."

"How could that be, when you wrote that note on the very day on which the tragedy occurred, and that too after you left the house on your way to the depot?"

"The letter was not written on that day, but the day, or rather night before I went away."

"It is dated the same day."

"I know it is, but it was written the night before."

"How did you come to date it a day ahead?"

"It is a habit of mine when writing late at night to date my letters the following day."

"That is plausible enough, but there is another matter which I believe you will have more difficulty in explaining."

"What is that?"

"The letter was not received by Kate until a few minutes before she left the house, and at least two and a half hours after you had gone and were supposed to be on your way to Chicago. Did you see her after that?"

"I did not, and she did not receive this letter after I left, but during the forenoon, for she came to me as soon as she received it and told me that she could not comply with my request, as it might compromise her."

"But your sister says she saw her receive it after three o'clock in the afternoon of the day you left."

The young man appeared perplexed for a moment, and then his face lighted up as he exclaimed:

"I understand it now. After my father left me at the depot I found that I had a few minutes to wait for the train, and I took advantage of the opportunity to write a note to Kate, in which I reproached her for refusing to meet me at Riverside Park. That is the letter she received, and not this one. That I did not meet her ought to be clear enough, when my father knows that I was in Chicago in time to receive and answer his telegram yesterday afternoon."

This was a poser, and the detective was unable to answer it, at the same time he wondered at the young man's presence of mind in thinking of recalling this circumstance.

Burr could not refrain from asking himself whether an innocent man would have thought of it.

And then his mind reverted to the alleged letter again.

"Your sister saw Kate receive a letter," he resumed, "and when she came into the room and surprised her, Kate was reading and weeping over it. As soon as she saw that your sister had discovered her, she put the letter in a drawer of the cabinet and locked it. She then hastily made a note of the number with which she locked the drawer and attempted to put it into her pocket, but failed and the scrap of paper fell to the floor where your sister subsequently found it. It was by that means that I was enabled to open the drawer."

"You found this letter in the drawer, then?"

"Yes."

"And not the other?"

"No. However, I looked no further after finding this one. It may be there. I shall

look at once. I am glad you reminded me of it."

"Yes, let us find the other letter, if possible," returned Leonard enthusiastically, rising. "Although I have no doubt that I can easily prove an *alibi*, it may serve to remove any present suspicion from your mind to find the second letter, and the one which my sister evidently saw her reading. Come."

And he made for the door.

Thad followed, and the two were soon ascending the stairs.

The drawer still stood partially open as Thad had left it on the previous day, and the young man drew it out and took out the package of letters from which the detective had taken the missive which had appeared to implicate Leonard in the crime.

Thad received them from his hand with some doubt, for as he had found the other letter, which was supposed to have been written first, on top, he had little hope of finding the other one in the package at all.

However, he proceeded to con the envelopes over mechanically, in which performance he was closely watched by the young man.

He had not gone far down into the package when Leonard exclaimed:

"There it is!"

At the same moment Thad recognized the handwriting on the envelope as the same as that on the first one he had found.

He drew it out of the pack and saw that it bore the card of the New York Central Railroad in one corner.

This appeared to clinch Leonard's story about having written the letter in the depot.

"I got it from the agent, who is a friend of mine," explained Leonard, as he noticed the other looking at the stamp.

Thad nodded affirmatively, and drew the letter from the envelope.

It did not take him long to run through the contents, and he saw that they corresponded with the description the young man had given of them.

Replacing the letter, the detective said:

"I am satisfied that what you have told me is correct, and I no longer have any reason to believe that you had any connection with the affair at Riverside Drive. Nevertheless, you may be able to assist me in the solution of a tough problem."

"What is it?"

"What reason can you assign for Kate going to Riverside Park at the time of day she did, instead of going to Newburg, as she pretended she was going to do?"

"I know no more than yourself, sir."

"Did she say nothing about it to you?"

"Nothing."

"Did she intimate that she intended going to Newburg when she spoke to you?"

"She did not."

"Nor anywhere else?"

"No."

"Did she appear despondent or downhearted?"

"Yes, she seemed a little downhearted."

"Did she appear to regret the step she had taken in marrying your father instead of yourself?"

"I could not say as to that. She was downhearted and cried a good deal, but I could only surmise the cause."

"She did not tell you?"

"No."

"Did you ask her?"

"Yes, I asked her the cause of her sadness, but she only said 'Nothing,' and changed the subject."

"Has she ever appeared, at any time since the wedding, to regret her step?"

"I do not know. You see, I have not seen her since until three days ago, when I came on for a visit."

"Had you much talk with her on the subject this time?"

"The subject was never broached between us. In all our conversation the subject of our late engagement and her marriage to my father was never once mentioned."

"Was it not brought up when she told you she had received your letter and could not comply with your request?"

"No."

"What did she say?"

"She received the letter in the morning, and about noon we met in the parlor. My

father was present, but was absorbed in his paper. I was standing near the piano, and she came over and made some remark about a piece of music lying there, and then in an undertone she said: 'I got it, you naughty fellow, but you don't expect me to comply with your request?' 'Why not?' I asked. 'It would never do,' she replied, and walked away quickly, as if afraid that I would insist upon my request."

"Had you no more conversation with her before you left?"

"Not another word, except to bid her good-by."

"And you never saw her afterward?"

"Never, until I saw her in her coffin."

"Had she any enemies, that you are aware of?"

"None that I know of. Let me see," he hesitated. "However, that was a long time ago," he went on, "and he is either dead or far away, which is the same thing, so far as this matter is concerned."

"What do you refer to?"

"It was nothing," returned the other, evasively.

"But you alluded to him," persisted the detective. "Whom do you mean?"

"My eldest brother," faltered Leonard, after some hesitation. "He and Kate were never very good friends."

"What was the cause of their dislike for each other?"

"I do not know. They never liked each other, and finally when she discovered—However, I do not see that that circumstance can interest you."

"Yes, I should like to know what it was," cried the detective, eagerly. "In ferreting out a thing of this kind it is first of all important, if not necessary, to discover a motive somewhere. Please tell me the story to which you allude."

"Well, it was simply that my father had discovered that he was being robbed. Harper, my eldest brother, was assistant bookkeeper, and father was unable to tell whether it was he or the head bookkeeper who was robbing him. He brought the books home and had Kate, who was an expert accountant, help him with them. They had worked on them pretty late one night, and when they had finally quit for the night, and Kate had just gone to her room, she heard some one walk stealthily past her door. Harper's room was next to hers, and she knew that no one except he would be likely to come along the hall from that direction at that time of night, and she suspected something wrong. Of course she could not even imagine what it was, but she decided to watch his movements, so she slipped out of her door and watched the retreating figure, which she had no difficulty in recognizing as that of my brother. She saw him go to the room where they had left the books, which was on the next floor above, and she followed him. As soon as he closed the door and lighted the gas, she got a chair and watched him over the transom. She saw him open the books and proceed to write something. She hurried away to my father's room and told him what she had seen, and he followed her up-stairs, and, mounting the chair, saw what was going on. My father, in a white heat of rage, knocked on the door and demanded admittance, and when my brother finally reluctantly admitted him, my father accused him of his crime. Harper, fairly caught, confessed, and father drove him from the house."

"What has become of your brother?"

"I do not know. The last we heard of him, he was in California. We think he must be dead."

"How long ago did this thing happen?"

"About four years ago."

CHAPTER VII.

RECOGNITION.

AFTER a few moments' reflection, Thad came to the conclusion that this wayward brother was the most likely one to have committed the horrible crime of Riverside Drive. After wandering about for four years he had returned to his old home, but dared not enter his father's house while his young step-mother lived, and decided to put her out of the way.

But the mystery was, how came she to go

to Riverside Park, and why had she deceived her family in the matter?

Perhaps after refusing Leonard, she had relented and had gone there with the hope that he would come after all. Perhaps this erring brother had watched her movements and followed her as she had him on the night of the discovery of his dishonesty, and, once finding her alone in the quiet place, he had carried out his infamous scheme and pushed her over the cliff.

The detective then reverted to the lunatic.

Could it be possible that he was no other than Harper Stern?

He then recalled what the poor fellow had said during his ravings about somebody trying to kill him, and remembered that he said the person was a tall man with a dark mustache.

Thus far the description suited Leonard, but might it not also suit Harper?

Turning to his young companion, he asked: "What is the description of your brother? Was he tall like yourself, and had he a dark mustache like you?"

Leonard started as though he had felt an electric shock.

"Why, have you seen him?" he asked nervously.

"Not that I know of."

"Well, you have described him exactly. He was about my size and resembled me so closely that we were frequently mistaken for each other."

So far Thad's theory held good.

But the answer also settled the point about the crazy man being Harper Stern.

The description did not suit him at all.

"I should not wonder if I had hit upon a theory, possibly a clue," observed Thad, musingly.

"How is that?" demanded the other, looking up suddenly.

Burr did not answer immediately, but after a moment's reflection, he went on:

"I have learned enough to know that the man who committed the murder fills that description. He was tall and had a dark mustache."

Leonard smiled a little ironically.

"You might find a good many men in this town of that description."

"True enough. But when we find what I spoke of awhile ago—a motive for the crime, and then discover that the individual who entertained that motive fits the description of the man who committed the crime, we are coming pretty close to a clue."

"How do you know that the man who committed the murder suited that description?"

"I do not know it positively, but I have received an intimation to that effect, and in this connection, I would like to ask you to take a drive with me some time during the forenoon to-morrow."

The young man looked surprised.

"Where to?" he asked, suspiciously, as though he feared that Thad had some evil design upon him.

"Just across town to Bellevue Hospital. I want you to see if you can identify a patient there."

"A patient?" said Leonard, with a puzzled countenance.

"Yes, a person who appears to know something about the case."

He appeared more puzzled than ever.

"What is he doing in the hospital?" he asked.

"He is sick."

"Oh."

As the eyes of the two men met Burr thought he detected something in the orbs of the young man that was not altogether right.

It was impossible to describe it.

It was not exactly sinister, nor was it quite that of the hunted individual.

It was more like that of an innocent man who feels that a network of circumstantial evidence is closing about him in spite of his innocence or his fighting against it.

But after a brief struggle, as it seemed, the strange expression passed away and he said cheerfully:

"Very well, I will go with you. What time will be suitable?"

"Any time that will be agreeable to you. We had better go early, however; say about ten o'clock."

"That will suit me."

As Burr was about passing out of the hall the old gentleman came out of the parlor and accosted him.

"Well?" he said, "What do you find?"

"Nothing of importance," replied Thad.

The old man's face brightened.

"You do not think there is any chance of his being guilty?"

"No."

The detective had a double motive in answering thus.

He was desirous of relieving the old gentleman's mind, and he deemed it best to keep any suspicions that he might entertain to himself, for he was satisfied that if the young man was guilty he was a clever customer and too much caution could not be exercised in trapping him.

Mr. Stern's face glowed with happiness, so much so that he appeared to have forgotten his late grief.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he cried, rapturously, clasping Thad's hand. "In spite of appearances, I have believed my son innocent all along, and now you confirm my belief. You place me under great obligations to you, and when you have discovered the real culprit, you shall name your own reward."

"I am glad to know that you appreciate my humble efforts, Mr. Stern, but it will be time to talk of reward when I have earned one. So far I have done nothing."

"Yes, you have. You have made great progress in discovering that my boy is innocent."

Thad felt that he would have been better satisfied himself if he knew positively that the young man was innocent, but he did not.

However, he kept this to himself, and after a little more talk on common topics, took his leave.

Punctual at ten o'clock the following day he drove to the house in a cab and called for Leonard.

That young gentleman soon joined him and they drove away to Bellevue Hospital.

"How is our patient?" he asked of the nurse, as soon as he was admitted to the ward.

"Och, sor, an' he's coming on foine," replied the nurse. "He's coming to his senses, an' the doctor do be sayin' that he'll be all roight in a few days."

"That's good," replied Thad in his accustomed kindly voice. "Can we see him now?"

"Wal, he's shlapin' now, sor, but he'll soon be waikin', Oi'm thinkin'."

"It don't matter about him being asleep. I do not care about speaking to him. I only wish to have a glimpse of his face, to see if this gentleman can identify him."

"Ah, thin, an' yez kin look at his face all yez want," rejoined the old woman, turning and leading the way toward the other end of the ward.

As she had stated, the lunatic was peacefully sleeping when they reached the bedside, but his face was turned up in such a manner as to render it easily recognizable by any one who knew him.

"Take a good look at him, Mr. Stern," said Burr, "and tell me if you ever saw him before."

Leonard gazed at the upturned face a long time, and finally turning to the detective, shook his head with the remark:

"Never saw him before."

"You are sure?"

"I am quite positive. There is nothing about the face at all familiar."

Thad's face showed his disappointment, but he made no response.

The young man took another look at the face, and then asked in a musing tone:

"Why did you wish me to identify him, Mr. Burr?"

Thad thought a moment before replying to the inquiry.

He was not quite sure whether he should answer the question or not.

Finally, however, he concluded that it could do no harm, and rejoined:

"I found this fellow, who was as crazy as a bedbug, near the rock where the body of the girl was discovered, and in a wild, incoherent way, described the scene of the murder."

Leonard turned a little pale.

"Did—did he describe the murderer?" he faltered.

"Yes."

And the detective watched the effect of his answer upon the young man, and was surprised to see that he grew greatly confused.

He turned away from Burr and again fixed his eyes upon the sleeping man.

As he gazed Thad saw that the queer expression he had noted on the previous day again came into his eyes.

The eyes seemed riveted on the face as though he was unable to remove them.

The sleeping man soon began to move and writhed under the gaze, and before long opened his eyes.

As he did so, the first object that met his vision was Leonard's face and staring eyes.

The lunatic sprang suddenly to a sitting posture and stared at the young man with an intensity and wildness that caused even the detective to shudder.

His black eyes appeared to flash fire.

And yet Leonard seemed unable to remove his gaze from him.

For more than a minute the two men stared at each other thus, and then the lunatic broke into a wild, incoherent fit of raving, which soon became intelligible.

"That is he!" he cried. "That is the man that tried to kill me when I tried to save her! I know him! I would know that face—those eyes, anywhere! It is he! Let me get at him! I'll tear him to pieces!"

And he acted as though he would put the threat into execution, and probably would have done so, had not Thad caught him and threw him back upon the couch.

Still Leonard did not move from his position or remove his gaze from the lunatic's face.

It seemed to be held there by some unholy spell.

The lunatic struggled desperately to free himself and get at the young man, but he was completely helpless in the hands of the gigantic detective, and so appeared to realize the fact and ceased to struggle.

He never ceased yelling, though, and raised such a rumpus that the detective was compelled to ask Leonard to leave the ward, or at least, get out of the crazy man's sight.

As soon as he was gone, the patient quieted down and had nothing more to say.

He appeared so rational, in fact, that Burr concluded to question him and see whether something tangible could not be obtained from him.

After coaxing and talking to the patient in a kindly way for some time, he asked:

"You seemed to know that fellow who was just here. Where did you ever see him?"

The lunatic stared blankly at him and made no reply.

"Don't you remember the man with the black eyes?" pursued Thad. "The man who looked at you so hard, and whom you said tried to kill you and did kill the girl?"

But it was no use. The mind appeared to have become a blank again, and could not grasp even this simple question.

Thad repeated the question in various forms several times, but the poor fellow only stared with a puzzled expression and did not answer, and he finally gave it up.

"That is a strange case," observed the doctor, who had arrived while the detective was attempting to catechize the patient.

"Nothing but vision seems to recall anything to his memory. He appears to know every one by sight, but the moment they are out of his sight no amount of describing will recall them to his recollection."

"Yes, I have just had occasion to note the fact," rejoined Thad. "The gentleman who came in with me seems to have recalled some one who has at some time done him an injury, and the sight of him drove the poor fellow to raving."

"Indeed? Suppose you fetch your friend here again and let us see what the effect will be."

Burr recalled Leonard and the young man came alongside of the couch, and the lunatic's eyes, in the course of their wanderings, fell upon his face again.

The effect was like that of an electric shock.

He sprang up and clear out of bed this time, and it required all the strength the de-

tective cared to expend to prevent him from getting at Leonard.

"Let me at him!" he shouted. "He tried to kill me, and did kill her! I know him! I know those devilish eyes! They looked at me that night when he tried to kill me, when I was trying to stop the horses and save her."

Meanwhile Leonard's eyes had become fixed upon the face of the lunatic again, and he appeared to be oblivious to everything else.

"Never mind now, my poor friend," cooed Thad in a gentle tone. "You are too weak to fight him now. Wait till you get stronger and you shall get at him."

"No, no! I am strong now. A thousand times stronger than he. I would have whipped him that night if he had not struck me down with a club like a dog, but he didn't kill me. I fought—fought! Ha! ha! ha! I fought like a tiger!"

As soon as he came to a pause in his ravings Thad took advantage of the opportunity to ask:

"Who is this man?"

The lunatic's eyes became fixed on the face of Leonard again and he stared at him for a long time, but he appeared unable to make out who he was, for after a long while he shook his head and became silent.

The doctor then requested Leonard to walk away again, and the lunatic became as quiet as a lamb.

"There is something strange about this case," observed Thad when the young man was beyond earshot. "I do not understand it. He seems to recognize the young man's face, and yet he cannot recall his name."

"Perhaps he never knew his name," suggested the doctor. "It is my opinion that he never did, and it is also my belief that he has seen his face and sustained some wrong at his hands."

"It certainly has that appearance," admitted Burr. "However, it may be a crazy illusion of his. My young friend has a brother who bears a striking resemblance to him. It may have been the brother who committed the outrage."

"Possibly," replied the doctor in a skeptical tone. "But how do you account for your friend's fascination when he comes near this poor fellow?"

"That is a thing which has been puzzling me. Still, we shall be able to make more out of it when this fellow recovers his reason, if he ever does."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

LEONARD was nervous and silent when they left the hospital, and Thad became more than ever convinced that there was something wrong somewhere.

He was still unable to fix any clue or theory upon the young man, but from several little things which had passed—such as his readiness to rebut every bit of evidence brought against him, as though he had studied the whole matter out, and finally his unaccountable actions in the presence of the lunatic.

After pondering over the subject for some time after entering the cab, he finally said:

"It was rather strange that that fellow imagined he knew you, Mr. Stern, wasn't it?"

"Eh?" he cried.

"I say it was rather strange that the fellow in the hospital should have imagined that he knew you."

"Yes, it was strange," muttered the other in a scarcely audible voice.

"And yet you are sure you never saw him before?"

"Not—not that I remember of," faltered the young man.

"Still, he may have mistaken you for your brother," pursued Thad. "He must have done that, for you never attempted to kill him, of course."

"Of course not," echoed the young man, mechanically.

"But the strange part of it was the manner in which the lunatic appeared to fascinate you."

"Fascinate me?"

And Leonard stared as blankly at him as though he had never comported himself in the way he did.

"Yes," replied the detective. "you appeared unable to take your eyes off him."

The fellow grew red and white by turns, and became so confused that he was unable to utter a word for some moments.

"I was almost sure that you must have seen him somewhere, from the way you stared at him," continued Thad. "You seemed to forget that there was anybody or anything else about."

"No, I never saw him before," stammered Leonard at length. "I kept looking at him to ascertain whether I had or not, but I was finally convinced that I never had."

"You were still unconvinced when I called you back the second time, apparently."

"Yes, I was, until I had taken a second look at him."

"I wonder what he could have meant by his repeated allusion to horses?"

"Oh, that was in keeping with the rest of his raving," growled the young man, impatiently. "If I were you I should take no note of what a crazy man says."

If he had been desirous of increasing the detective's suspicion of him, he could not have uttered a more favorable phrase.

Still he held his peace, and determined to study the young man's actions more closely than ever, believing that he would sooner or later trip himself if left alone.

After parting with Leonard at the house of the latter's father, the detective drove downtown to look after some matters of business, and later returned to the spot in Riverside Park where he had found the parasol.

The place had a fascination for him; besides he had not visited it in daylight since the murder, and he was still sanguine of making some discovery that would put him onto a clue.

As he strolled along the foot of the cliff, his keen eyes searched every inch of ground they came in contact with.

He had not gone very far when he caught sight of something glistening in the grass close to the foot of the cliff.

He stooped down and picked it up, and found it be a revolver.

Glancing up at the rock above, he saw that the pistol had been lying directly beneath the place where he had found the girl hanging.

This was a surprise to him, for whoever had committed the murder had used no weapon, as the girl's body attested, and he was about concluding that the weapon had belonged to some one else, when it occurred to him to examine it.

The pistol had become somewhat rusty from exposure to the weather, but it was of fine workmanship and for the most part silver-mounted.

It was loaded, with the exception of one chamber, which was empty.

He turned it over in his hand to examine it further, when he met with a genuine surprise.

It was three initials engraved on the silver-mounting of the stock.

The initials were "L. E. S."

In spite of his late suspicions and half-developed theory, the discovery gave the detective a shock.

He had not expected to run upon anything quite so tangible, and indeed he felt as though he were arriving at the solution of the mystery too quickly.

"L. E. S.," he mused. "Leonard E. Stern. There can be no doubt of it. But why did he not use the pistol? Perhaps he did, though, as one chamber is empty, but he failed to hit his mark, and then there must have been a struggle and the pistol had slipped out of the assassin's hand and fallen over the cliff."

He then thought it possible that he might find the missing locket, and accordingly instituted a search for it, but in this he was not so fortunate, although he made a discovery which revived his hope just at the time when he was on the verge of despair.

The discovery was a small section of the gold chain, a portion of which had been found still clinging to the murdered girl's neck.

But having found that, he went no further.

Although he hunted till nearly dark, not another thing was discovered, and he finally abandoned the project.

When Thad again reached the top of the cliff he met a policeman, and asked him if he had been on duty on the night of the murder (naming the date).

The officer answered in the affirmative, but said that he was at the other end of his beat when the thing occurred.

"Where is the other end of your beat?" demanded the detective.

"Two blocks up," replied the policeman.

"Perhaps you saw a runaway team, then?"

"That same evening?"

"Yes."

"So I did. It was just as I reached the other end of my beat, and stopped a moment to speak with the officer on the other beat."

"Did you succeed in stopping them?"

"No, but they were headed off further up-town."

"By whom?"

"Some of the policemen up there."

"Did you find out where they belonged?"

"Yes, they belonged to a stable in Forty-second street."

"You made inquiry about who had taken the team out, I suppose?"

"No, that was none of our business. It was enough for us to do to return the team where it belonged."

"I suppose so," observed Thad sarcastically. "Did you notice what kind of a team it was?"

"Yes, they were a light chestnut, and were hitched to an open barouche. One of the horses had been shot and was still bleeding."

"Shot?"

"Yes. They extracted a bullet from his jaw."

"That was very strange, wasn't it?"

"Rather."

"Have they made no inquiry about the matter?"

"The matter was reported to Headquarters, but I don't know whether they have ever done anything about it or not."

"They probably have not, as I have heard nothing about it. Was the horse seriously injured?"

"I don't know as to that. He was able to do some pretty good running when I saw him."

Burr's next move was to visit the stable in Forty-second street, and make inquiries regarding the matter.

He found that what the policeman had said about the horse being shot was true, but the shot was, fortunately, not fatal. This circumstance only served to increase the mystery.

What could have been the motive in shooting the horse? Or perhaps it was an accident—that the shot was intended for a human.

The detective also learned that the team had been hired by a tall man with a dark mustache, at about five o'clock on the afternoon of the day of the tragedy, and in every detail the man's description corresponded with that of Leonard Stern.

Again was Thad forced to the conclusion that this man, who appeared so innocent and who also appeared capable of proving an *alibi*, must be the guilty man.

On quitting the livery stable, he again drove up-town, with a view to visiting the Sterns, and, if possible, inducing Leonard to accompany him back to Mason's stable. If the liveryman could identify him as the man who had hired the equipage on that afternoon, then the detective's work would be nearly at an end. It would only be necessary after that to prove that the young man had not gone to Chicago at all—which he now believed possible—to complete the chain of evidence against him.

Alighting from the cab at the opposite corner, he made his way on foot toward the house.

When within a few yards of the house the door opened and three men came out.

Thad stepped back into the shadow just in time to avoid being seen by the trio, and watched.

The men stopped on the stoop and conversed for some moments, but in so subdued a tone as to be inaudible to the detective, but he could see their faces very plainly, and saw that one of them was Leonard Stern.

The other two were strangers, although one of them resembled Leonard enough to be his brother.

Thad was more mystified than ever.

Could it be that this was the renegade brother of whom he had heard so much? And if so, what was he doing here in company with Leonard, and in the house of his father who had cast him off?

While these reflections were passing through his mind the two strangers took their leave of Leonard and walked away, while the young man himself re-entered the house.

The detective abandoned his idea of interviewing Leonard for that night and followed the strangers.

They did not go far, merely crossing the street and walking about a block to a hotel on the corner of Eighty-first street, and entered the bar.

Thad was close enough behind them to see that they entered one of two small private rooms forming a part of the *café*.

As the corresponding room was only separated from it by a thin partition, the detective entered this one and called for a glass of wine.

The men in the other room had already ordered drinks, and as soon as the waiter withdrew, they began to talk.

One man, whom the other addressed as "Doctor," appeared to be urging the other, whom he called "Paul," to do something, and the latter seemed to be wanting in courage to perform his part, for the doctor began the conversation with:

"I hope you aren't going to weaken at the last moment, my boy."

"I do not see how I am going through with it, doctor," rejoined the other. "I am no coward, and yet in this matter I feel that I cannot trust myself."

"What are you afraid of?" sneered the other.

"I do not know—myself, I think."

"You are a fool, Paul. The trouble is, you are afraid."

"To tell you the truth, I am afraid. I am not cursed with your ferocious nature and iron will. I am the most miserable dog living."

This admission appeared to either touch the other with a sense of commiseration, or else he deemed it politic to change his attitude toward his fellow-conspirator, for he said:

"Come, cheer up, my boy. You are not yourself to-night. Don't fail me at the last minute, when everything depends upon you. Just think that we have almost finished; one more stroke of our cars, and we are in port. Take another drink, and you will feel stronger."

"It is no use. The more I drink, the weaker my courage grows. All I can think of is, suppose we should fail—that I should be discovered before the thing is accomplished?"

"There is not the least danger, if you will only keep your courage up. Besides, suppose you are discovered?"

"I would be ruined."

"Ruined? Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the doctor. "You amuse me. The idea of an outcast like yourself talking of ruin!"

"I admit that I am all you say, nevertheless I entertain hopes of some day reclaiming myself, of proving my innocence and regaining my lost position."

"That is all nonsense! The only person who had the power of removing the stain from your name is dead, and it must remain forever. So your only salvation is money. Get that, and you are the master. You can defy them all."

"Perhaps you are right, but think of the injustice!"

"Injustice, nonsense! Have you not been the victim of injustice for a long time? And are you not likely to remain a victim to all time if you do not take up the cudgel in your own behalf and fight injustice with its own weapons?"

"This is all very well in its way, but I cannot forget that those who will be wronged by this transaction are not only innocent of any evil toward me, but are themselves dear to me, in spite of the fact that they cast me off."

"But you have already committed yourself. How are you going to back out now?"

"I have not gone so far but that I am safe in retreating."

"Don't be too sure about that!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will not permit it."

"How will you prevent it?"

"That will be easy enough. I will only have to report certain little matters to certain parties and identify you with certain others, and your chances of reinstatement in society would be rather slim, I imagine."

This was followed by a silence which continued for some time, and then the doctor said:

"It is ten o'clock. The time has arrived. What are you going to do?"

This was uttered in a cold, unsympathetic voice, and Thad could tell from the changed position of the voice that the man had risen and was pacing the floor.

The only response to the question was a groan from the other, and the doctor cleared his throat impatiently.

"Come!" he cried, presently, "let us have an end of this. Either you go or not, and whatever you intend doing you must make up your mind now. Will you go or not?"

"My God!" groaned Paul.

"Yes or no?" persisted the other.

Another silence, and then:

"Yes, I will go. Come on."

"Now you talk like a man," observed the doctor, cheerfully. "I thought you would come to your senses when you came to think the matter over."

And the two men left the saloon.

CHAPTER IX.

A HORRIBLE CRIME.

BELIEVING that the men were bent upon some sort of mischief, the nature of which he could not imagine, Thad followed them into the street and reached it just in time to see them ascending the Elevated Railway steps.

He followed close at their heels, and was on the platform as soon as they were.

It was on the down-town side, and it was not long before a train came along and the two men entered a car and took a seat.

Thad was fortunate enough to get a seat directly behind them.

As soon as they were seated the doctor, who the detective now saw was a man of fifty or more, with gray hair and beard, and had the air of a well-to-do gentleman, took out his watch and, after consulting it, observed:

"I'm afraid we are going to be late, and if we are, it will be all your fault, on account of your dallying so long."

The younger man bit his lip and made no immediate reply, but after a silence of some moments, said:

"I do not know but it would have been better for me if I had dallied still longer."

"Why?"

"Then perhaps I would have been spared the ordeal through which I will have to pass."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"Escaped one ordeal only to pass through another," he remarked in a scornful tone.

"That would be impossible," groaned the young man.

"You may not think so, but perhaps a taste of what would be in store for you would serve to change your mind. But let us not discuss that. You have decided to do the most sensible thing, and that is an end of it. Have you thought how you are to act in this business, my boy?"

"No. I left that to you," rejoined the young man in an apathetic voice.

"It was probably as well, as your head is too full of other matter to admit of a clear plot. Well, if we are in time—if the news of our scheme has not been brought to the old woman, you will have no difficulty in carrying out your part of it. Tell her what I told you, and she acquiesces, your work will be easy. Once we get the girl away, we are safe. But she must be got away to-night. Another thing, don't forget to get possession of the locket."

"The Fatal Charm?"

"Yes."

Somehow the mention of this appeared to revive the young man's spirits, for he smiled and replied:

"Trust me for that. I don't propose that that shall get me into any more difficulties."

When the train reached Fourteenth street the two men got off and walked at a brisk pace toward the North River. Thad had no difficulty in following them, as they took no precaution to conceal their course, and evidently did not suspect that they were being shadowed.

They continued as far west as Ninth avenue and then turned down-town and walked one block.

Here they turned west again along Thirteenth street and stopped before a shabby, old-fashioned two-story house.

The house was in total darkness, and the doctor looked up at it with a good deal of apprehension.

"I'm afraid we're too late," he observed. "Still, you might go in, and I will wait out here."

The young man hesitated, and finally said:

"What is the use, if you think they are gone?"

"But they may not be," retorted the doctor sternly. "Go in and ascertain."

Paul looked appealingly at the stern face before him, which stood out boldly in the light of a street lamp, but saw no sign of mercy there.

He then glanced at the house and shuddered.

At length he opened the gate and walked toward the house with a faltering gait.

When he reached the door he knocked—there being no bell—and the door was soon opened to him and he stepped in.

The doctor waited outside the gate, and Thad was in a dilemma what to do.

He would have given any sum to have been able to have approached the house and seen what was going on, but so long as the doctor kept his post this was out of the question.

But he was not long in finding a way out of his difficulty.

Being pretty well acquainted with the neighborhood, he knew that there was an alley running through the block, and he hurried back to the avenue, entered the alley and was soon at the rear of the house. But there was still a difficulty to surmount.

A high fence inclosed the lot and the gate leading into the alley was locked on the inside.

What was to be done?

It was impossible to scale the wall without a ladder, and he groped about the dark alley in search of a board or something that would take the place of one.

At length he stumbled against a cart which was standing there, and the problem was solved.

With a good deal of labor he succeeded in rolling the cart up to the wall and mounted it.

This raised him high enough to allow him to catch the top of the wall by springing up, and he was soon on top of it. There was a good deal of a chance of meeting with a serious accident in jumping down into a dark lot, but he was too intent upon the accomplishment of his object then to permit any thing to stand in his way, and jumped.

Fortunately he met with no obstacle and landed on a smooth, even surface.

The yard extended around one side of the house to the front, and about midway there was a window covered with vines through which a light was streaming out into the yard.

Upon nearing the window he could hear the voices of people talking inside, and he drew as closely to the window as possible for the vines.

The window was partially open, and the voices from the interior were very distinct, but the curtain was down and he could see no one.

The detective at once recognized the voice of one of the speakers as that of the young man whom he had followed, and the other one was that of a woman, apparently an old one.

"It is too late for her to go out to-night," he heard the lady say, "and I cannot permit such a thing."

"But this is an urgent case," interposed the young man.

"How urgent?"

"Her sister is sick—not expected to live, in fact."

"I do not believe it. She has never spoken

to me about having a sister, and I know she would have done so if she had one, for she has told me everything about herself."

"Everything?" sneered the young man.

"Yes, everything," snapped the old woman.

"Has she told you that she has been married?"

"Yes."

The young man indulged in a derisive laugh.

"To whom did she say she was married?" he asked.

"She told me his name—Sterns, I think," replied the woman. "Yes, that was the name."

"Has she told you why she left him?"

"Only that they couldn't agree."

Paul laughed again.

"Ah, I see that she has not told you everything."

"What do you mean?"

"That was not the reason she left him at all."

"What was it then?"

"That is for me to know. But that is not the point. She has got to go with me to-night. Do you hear?"

"I hear, and heed as much as if it was the wind blowing."

"Then I tell you again that she has got to go with me to-night. If you consent to this and make me no trouble, your reward will be big, but if you deny me—well, there is a way of compelling people to do things sometimes."

"What, do you threaten me, Paul Berwick?" she cried in a vehement voice.

"I say nothing. Only, if you do not consent to what I ask you, it will be the worse for you, while, if you go up-stairs and keep out of the way until the thing is over, it will be big money in your pocket."

Thad heard the sound of some one rising and walking across the floor, and as soon as the woman spoke again he knew that she had risen and approached more closely to the young man.

"Look here, Paul Berwick, I am a lone woman, with no one to protect me, but do not imagine that you can frighten me with your threats. Nor need you think you can bribe me to do that young woman a wrong, or permit you to do it. All the money you have, and that of Doctor Hulsted, would not be enough inducement."

The young man again broke out in one of his peals of laughter, only this time there was more of good nature and less of the sneer about it.

"Nonsense!" he cried in a coaxing tone.

"Who is going to harm the girl?"

"You will, if I allow her to go out with you."

"Nothing of the kind. Didn't I tell you that her sister was sick and that I wanted to simply take her there?"

"And didn't I tell you it was a lie, that she has no sister?"

"In which you were mistaken, Mrs. Shelby."

"Nevertheless, I do not believe it, and shall act accordingly. If I had no other reason to doubt your statement, the fact of your offering to bribe me to allow her to go, and then when I would not be bribed, threatening me, proves it. But you forget that I know you of old, Paul Berwick. You have deceived and lied to me too often for me to believe you now."

Berwick appeared to be at the end of his rope for some moments, but he finally arose and said:

"This is your final decision, is it, Mrs. Shelby?"

"It is," she replied.

"So be it, then. But remember that we are not to be balked in our plans!"

"We? You mean that infamous Dr. Hulsted, I suppose?"

"Well, suppose I do?"

"I have as little fear of him as I have of you. You are both a pair of cowards, as well as blacklegs, and would not attack a cat unless you could do so from behind. When that poor girl came to me and asked me to protect her, I promised to do it with my life, and I shall keep my word."

"It's a great business you've gone into, Mrs. Shelby!" sneered Berwick. "Nobody would have supposed that you would ever have got into this business."

"It matters little what people would have thought or what they wouldn't. That is my business. Whatever I have been in the past I have never wronged anybody, especially one of my own sex, and you know that as well as I do. When you came the other day and claimed to be the girl's friend, I was foolish enough to believe you and tell you that she was here. I might have known then that your motive was for no good. But I do know it now, beyond a doubt, and I shall make up for my folly then by protecting her now."

"Look here, my good woman, I do not want to threaten you, but suppose I should report to her people where she is, what do you suppose the consequence would be?"

"I do not fear the consequences. I have done nothing wrong. She came here of her own accord, and is at liberty to leave when she chooses, provided she does not go in your company."

"But you are mistaken in thinking that nothing would come of my reporting this matter to her friends. Listen: They imagine she is being held by some evil-minded person, and the moment they discover where she is, they will not stop to inquire whether she is here of her own accord or is kept by force. In the mean time, they will have learned the character of your house and yourself, and everything will be against you."

It was now her time to laugh.

"You make me smile," she said. "Do you not suppose she would say that I had not held her against her will?"

"Hardly."

"Why not?"

"Because she would not like to make herself out a liar, as she would if she did that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she has already informed them that she is being held against her will."

"Nonsense!" snapped the old woman. "How could she inform them?"

"By letter."

"Why then, did she not tell them where she was?"

"Because she did not want them to know."

The old woman seemed to be nonplused and was silent; meanwhile the young man gave vent to another of his laughs.

"Come, what do you say?" he demanded, peremptorily.

"That my mind is made up, and I shall not break my resolution," she retorted, firmly.

"And you will run the risk?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I have given you timely warning. You will hear from me again soon."

"As soon as you like," she returned, coldly.

He walked toward the door and pretty soon the door was heard to close.

Thad moved round to the front of the house, still keeping in the shadow, and saw him join the doctor outside the gate.

Leaving the corner of the house and creeping along the side fence, the detective got up to within earshot of the men.

They were already engaged in an animated discussion, and the doctor appeared to be angered at Berwick's failure.

"You are a fool, Paul Berwick!" he was heard to say. "The idea of allowing a woman to get the best of you! You seem to have the courage of a chicken! From the length of time you were in there I expected you were accomplishing something."

"It was impossible," pleaded the young man, in a crushed voice. "She could not be induced by an offer of money nor intimidated by threats."

"Did you mention the letter?"

"Yes."

"What did she say to that?"

"It seemed to dampen her a little, but in the end she would not yield, and said she would protect the girl with her life."

"And you allowed her to bluff you off like that?"

"What could I do?"

"Nothing, I suppose. But I would have done something. Well, there is but one thing left us, and that is the extremity I mentioned. Have you got your pistol?"

"Yes," replied Paul, timidly.

"Come on, then."

"You aren't going to—"

"Certainly. Come on!"

And they moved toward the house again.

CHAPTER X.

THAD TO THE RESCUE.

THAD realized that some desperate deed was about to be committed, and determined to prevent it if possible.

The men approached the front door and one of them knocked, but the detective did not wait to see whether they would be admitted or not. He knew that he would be no match for the two, armed as they undoubtedly were, else he would have attacked them before they entered the house.

Therefore, realizing the situation, he made at once for the rear of the house and knocked lustily on the back door.

There was no response, and he repeated the knock.

Still there was no response, and he determined to try to break the door in.

He threw his weight against it, but to no purpose.

He then looked about the yard for a stone or something with which to break the lock, but in this he was equally disappointed.

Finally he thought of the vines at the side of the house and made his way there in all haste.

There was a trellis-work extending to the window of the second floor.

"I wonder if it will bear my weight?" he mused, and putting his foot into one of the openings of the lattice, grasped the framework and drew himself up.

The structure bent frightfully under his weight, but did not break, and he began to climb.

He was too eager to accomplish his object now to think of danger, and mounted the frail lattice-work as rapidly as though it had been constructed for that purpose.

In a few more seconds he was even with the window, and grasped the ledge.

Fortunately the window was open, and he had no trouble in drawing himself up and stepping inside.

He found himself in a large room, corresponding to the one down-stairs, which he afterward found occupied the greater part of the lower floor, and he could see that the door on one side was open.

Stepping lightly to the door, he could hear voices down-stairs.

One was that of the old woman and the other was that of the doctor, and there was a wrangle going on between them.

"I will have no more nonsense, madam!" he heard the doctor say. "Do not imagine that you are dealing with Paul now. You will find that I am made of different stuff. Where is the girl?"

"That is for you to find out!" snapped the old woman bravely. "You will never take her from this house while I live, Dr. Hulsted, if I am a woman! You boast of being made of different stuff from Paul. In my opinion you are both made of about the same material, and the coward and sneak predominates, otherwise you would not try to intimidate an old woman."

"Oh, don't attempt to enlist my sympathy by reminding me that you are a woman. You ought to know by this time that I am no respecter of persons when I have an object to accomplish."

"I don't remind you that I am a woman for the purpose of enlisting your sympathy, sir, for I know that you have none—not even for your own wife, whom you—"

"Stop!" cried the enraged doctor. "Refer to that matter here, and I shall not be responsible for what I do. But we are losing time. Tell me where the girl is at once!"

"That I shall not do," replied the old woman, firmly.

"You will not?"

"Never!"

"Then take that!"

And Thad heard a blow, which was followed by a woman's scream.

He waited to hear no more.

With a few rapid strides he was down-stairs, and the next instant he was standing facing the irate doctor.

The woman had reeled and fallen into a chair, and was bleeding profusely from a wound she had received in the head.

The doctor was too much astonished by the sudden and unexpected appearance of Thad to speak or even move for some seconds, and in the mean time the detective had drawn his revolver and covered the culprit.

"What does all this mean, sir?" he demanded.

"That is my affair!" growled the discomfited doctor. "Who are you, anyway?"

"That is nothing to you. However, I may as well tell you that I am an officer of the law, and you are my prisoner for attempting to murder that woman!"

The doctor turned pale, but he soon recovered his self-assurance, and assuming an air of injured innocence, began:

"You do not understand this case, sir. This woman is detaining a young lady here against her will, and I, as her friend, have come to rescue her. This woman is a notorious character, and the young lady is in great danger in her house. If you will not allow me to do my duty, however, I will go, and procure legal means to rescue her."

"Your story is a very good one, and might sound very well to me, if I didn't happen to know all about the case. This young lady came here of her own accord, and this woman, no matter what she is or has been, is befriending and protecting her, while you and your pal are trying to carry her away for some villainous purpose."

"You have been misinformed, sir, I—"

At this point an exclamation from the old woman caused the detective to turn his head, and he was surprised to see that Berwick, whom he had lost sight of during his engagement with the doctor, was just vanishing through the back door, bearing what appeared to be an unconscious woman in his arms.

Relinquishing all thought of the man with whom he had been contending, he turned and started in pursuit of the villain.

This action was the mistake of his life.

He had no more than reached the door leading into the back room, and through which Berwick had vanished, when he was stunned by a blow on the head from behind, grew dizzy and blind, and the next instant he reeled and fell to the floor.

Everything grew dark before him, but with a desperate effort and a tremendous exertion of will power, he raised himself to a sitting posture, and the next instant was upon his feet again; but he had no more than done so, when a second blow from the same direction felled him senseless to the floor.

What happened after that was a complete blank to the detective.

When he recovered consciousness, he found the old woman bending over him in the act of pouring some brandy down his throat.

She had put a pillow under his head had bound up the wound, besides bathing his face in camphor and applying such other simple remedies as a woman knows so well how to apply.

"How do you feel now?" came the cooing voice of the old woman as soon as he opened his eyes.

"Very well," was his careless reply. "Where are those scoundrels that were just here?"

"They are gone."

"And the girl?"

"They took her along."

"The fiends! I wonder where they intend to take her."

"God knows," murmured the old woman in a broken voice. "They are capable of any villainy, and there is no telling where they will take her or what they will do with her."

"What is their motive in carrying her off?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Who is she, anyway?"

"That I do not know. She said her name was Smith when she came to me, but of course that is not her right name. After she had been here awhile she said she had been married to a man by the name of Stern, and that he wanted to kill her, and wanted me to protect her, and I did so. That's all I know about her."

"She did not tell you where she had lived?"

"No."

"Nor who her husband was?"

"No, except that his name was Stern."

"What is she like?"

"She is a very pretty young woman, with dark brown curly hair and lovely hazel eyes."

Thad was thunderstruck.

This was exactly the description of the girl whom he had found suspended from the rocks at Riverside Drive, and who had died at the hospital.

What terrible mystery was there here?

"What was her Christian name?" he asked eagerly.

"Kate, she told me to call her, although I suppose her right name was Katherine."

Now he was astonished.

Was it possible that the woman found on the rocks was not the real Katherine Stern, but some one masquerading as her? But if such was the case, why had the real Katherine left home and taken refuge with this disreputable woman?

After asking himself these questions which could not be answered, the detective turned to the old woman again and asked:

"How did she happen to come to you? Did she know you before?"

"I have a little idea of how she came to select my house as the man in the moon. The first I saw of her was late on last Friday night. I was all alone, and some one knocked at the door, and when I opened it, there she stood. She asked me if she might come in. I told her she might, and she sat down and didn't open her mouth for a long time. At length she asked me if I lived there all alone, and I told her I did, most of the time, and then she asked me if I would let her stay with me. She said she had money and would pay me. I told her that I had very poor accommodations for one of her kind—she was well dressed and I could see that she belonged to a good family. She said she didn't care, that she would be contented with what I could give her, that she wanted to be where it was quiet. So I told her that if she was willing to put up with what I had, she was welcome, and she has been here ever since."

"Did you find her agreeable?"

"The sweetest creature I ever saw. She hadn't been in the house a day before I was fairly in love with her."

Thad reflected a moment, and then asked: "Had she any jewelry on her person by which one could identify her again?"

"Let me see," mused the old woman. "Nothing unusual, I believe. Oh, yes, she had too. She wore a locket around her neck."

"A locket?"

"Yes—a queer sort of thing. On one side was a sort of coat-of-arms like the big-bugs have, and on the other was carved the words: 'The Fatal Charm.'"

"Did you ever ask her about this strange trinket?"

"Yes, but she put me off by saying she just took a fancy to the thing on account of its oddity."

"She did not explain the significance of the legend, did she?"

"No, she would say no more about it."

After drinking a few sips of the brandy Thad felt strong enough to rise, and in spite of the old woman's protests, got upon his feet.

He found that, with the exception of a slight headache, he was not particularly hurt, although his head felt a trifle sore where the fellow had struck him with what he supposed to have been a pistol, and then he remembered that the old woman had also received a blow from the villainous doctor.

"Pardon me," he said. "You were also hurt by that rascal, weren't you, madam?"

"Not much," she replied. "He struck me with the butt of his pistol and staggered me, but he did not hurt me much."

"I noticed that you were bleeding considerably when I came down. Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"None to signify. He did cut my head a little, but not enough to bother me. My old head is too hard for that."

"Well, I am under many obligations to you for what you have done for me," observed the detective in a kindly voice.

"It is nothing at all," she rejoined. "Nothing to what you did for me."

"I did very little, I am sorry to say. If I

had, those fellows would not have got away with the girl."

"You did all you could under the circumstances. By the way, how did you get into the house?"

Thad related his experience with the trelis, and the old woman laughed heartily.

"But how came you to think of coming in?" she asked. "Did you hear the row?"

He told her how he had followed the two men from the house on Columbus avenue, of his listening at the window and finally of his overhearing the conversation at the gate.

"Then you must be a detective, aren't you?" she said.

"My secret is out, I am," he laughed.

"And now I must go."

"What is the use of going? I can give you a cool bed, and you will be better off than going out into the night air with that head of yours."

But he thanked her for the kind offer, and took his leave, promising to call back and tell her in case he found the girl.

She also promised to resort to him, (he gave her his name and address), in the event of the girl coming back there, as she was likely to do in case she made her escape from her captors.

Early the following forenoon he called upon Leonard Stern.

The young man received him with his usual cordiality, and to look at him, one could not imagine a more innocent person.

After some general conversation, Thad came to the point and said:

"Mr. Stern, you may deem it impertinent, but I must ask you to tell me who the two gentlemen who called upon you last night were?"

"Two gentlemen?" ejaculated the other with a surprised look.

"Yes. They left here about half-past nine or so, and you stood on the steps talking for some time after they left the house."

"Oh, I remember, now. That was a couple of friends of mine, Paul Berwick and Dr. Hulsted."

"Friends, eh?" the detective could not refrain from exclaiming. "If this is the kind of friends the young man has," he said to himself, "I need have no more hesitancy about believing him guilty of murder."

"What sort of men are they?" he demanded aloud.

"Gentlemen, I should say," was the reply.

"Can you vouch for that?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I cannot, any further than my observations have gone, and I do not know but I was wrong in calling them friends. The fact is, I have only known them about a month."

"Where did you meet them?"

"In Chicago. A friend of mine brought them and introduced them to me, for the purpose of having me identify them at a bank where one of them—the doctor, I think—wished to have a check cashed."

"Have you had any dealings with them since?"

"I have never had any dealings with them. They both belonged to a club of which I am a member, and I met them frequently there; and, as they appeared to be gentlemen and were extremely agreeable, we became quite intimate."

"Would you mind telling me the nature of their business here last night?"

"Merely a social call, that is all."

"Did they say nothing about a woman they were going to see—and 'rescue'?" asked Thad, insinuatingly.

The young man colored and became greatly confused.

CHAPTER XI.

IDENTIFIED.

As Leonard appeared to have no intention of answering the detective's last question, after waiting a reasonable time, he repeated it.

"Did these friends of yours say nothing about a young woman whom they intended to rescue from some person in the city?" he asked.

"It seems to me they did say something of the kind, now that you mention it, but I don't just recall what it was."

Thad thought he had him in a tight place for once, and continued in a firm tone:

"Did not they tell you, or were not you aware, that they were going to forcibly abduct a young woman, and one with whom you are acquainted?"

The young man had become cool by this time.

After a slight struggle with his emotions, he appeared to have regained his self-possession and got the better of his confusion.

"They did not tell me anything of the kind, nor did I know anything of the kind," he replied coolly. "I am at a loss to know what you mean by such a question, sir."

"Possibly," rejoined the detective in icy tones. "But when I know that such was the intent of these men, an intent which they were successful in carrying out in spite of my best efforts to prevent them, and then you tell me that they are your friends, and I know that they were in conversation with you last night, it is only natural that I should surmise that you know something about the affair."

"I know nothing," he retorted glumly.

Thad saw that there was nothing to be got out of him in that way, and concluded to change his tactics.

"Has either of your brothers been married, that you are aware of, Mr. Stern?" he asked.

"Norman has never been married," he replied, "for he is still at college and is only eighteen years old, but I cannot answer for Harper, for, as I think I told you before, I have not heard from him for four years or more."

"And of course you have never been married?"

"Certainly not."

"Have you any relatives by the name of Stern who have been recently married?"

"I have no relatives of that name in the country except an old aunt. Why do you ask?"

Thad hesitated, and then said:

"I will tell you. The young woman whom these friends of yours—"

"Acquaintances, not friends, if you please," interrupted the young man. "If they are the sort of men you claim they are, they are no friends of mine."

"Very well, acquaintances, then. The young woman whom they abducted goes by the name of Kate, and claims to have been married to a man by the name of Stern."

Leonard seemed puzzled, but presently replied:

"There are plenty of people in the city of that name, who are no relation to us."

"That is undoubtedly true, but the coincidence—if coincidence it is—is the fact of the young woman having the same name as your late step-mother."

"I see nothing strange about that," rejoined the young man indifferently. "Kate is a very common name. You will find it in about every second family."

"That is also true. But there is another strange thing in connection with the affair."

"What is that?"

"This woman bears a striking resemblance to your dead step-mother."

This information startled the young man a little, but he soon recovered his coolness, and replied as calmly as before:

"Even that is not strange. I can pick you out twenty young women of her age who, if dressed the same would be mistaken for sisters, or even twin sisters."

"Admitting even this possibility, there is even a stronger coincidence in this case."

"Eh?"

"This young lady wore a piece of jewelry which is exactly similar to a piece known to have been worn by your father's late wife, and I can hardly believe that two such pieces of jewelry are in existence."

Leonard paled a little and dropped his eyes to the floor, but again pulled himself together and inquired with a half sneer on his lips:

"What was the nature of this remarkable piece of jewelry?"

"It is a locket."

The young man started in earnest this time.

"A locket!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. And on one side was the crest of your family and on the reverse side the legend, 'The Fatal Charm.' Have you ever heard of such a piece of jewelry, Mr. Stern?"

But the young man had regained his coolness, smiled and responded lightly:

"Oh, yes. There was a locket in the family—has been for a long time—and was worn by Kate. I think she had it on when she went away."

"You know of no other one like it, do you?"

"No."

"How do you account for this young woman having it in her possession, then?"

"That is easily accounted for," rejoined Leonard flippantly. "If you remember, the locket was missing when Kate was found. In fact, you made the discovery yourself, and only a portion of the chain remained on her neck. Would it not be perfectly natural that someone would have it? And would it not be as natural for this woman to have it as any other?"

"Possibly."

"Let us imagine that the murder was committed by some scoundrel who took a fancy to the locket, and having got possession of it, gave it to his mistress."

"And this woman was the mistress?"

"Possibly. And the fact of her calling herself Stern, or claiming that she had been married to a man of that name, may indicate that she and her paramour are working a scheme of some kind."

There appeared so much reason about this theory that, in spite of his prepossession against young Stern, Thad could not but give it some credence.

At the same time he could not help but think there was something behind this proneness of his for formulating theories that were calculated to acquit himself of suspicion.

"Well," resumed the detective, after some reflection, "there is but one thing for me, and that is to clear up this mystery as well as I can, alone. I see that I am not likely to receive any light from your family."

"We are willing to furnish you all the information that lies within our power," retorted Leonard warmly. "What more can you ask? I have never hesitated to tell you all that I knew in the matter."

"I ask pardon, Mr. Stern," Thad cried in a conciliatory voice. "I did not mean to insinuate that you were not willing to give me all the information in your possession, but I am sorry that you have no more to give. There is one request I have to make of you."

"What is that?"

"I should like to have you go with me and see if you are able to identify another party."

Leonard flushed.

"This woman?" he almost gasped.

"No. I do not know where she is. It is another party."

"Who is it?" he inquired with some apprehension.

"I do not know. That is why I wish you to identify him."

"It is a man, then?"

"Yes."

"I will go with you."

The two men left the house, took the Elevated train down-town and got off at Forty-second street. Here they walked a couple of blocks to Seventh avenue, and came to the livery stable.

As they approached the stable Thad anticipated some show of nervousness on the part of the young man, but was disappointed. He walked right along without so much as a tremor, and conversing cheerfully, until they were directly in front of the stable. Then the detective stopped and asked his companion to remain where he was while he went inside to speak to some one.

Leonard complied and the detective went inside. Here he ascertained which one of the attendants had let the equipage of that memorable Friday afternoon.

There was no trouble about this, as the circumstance was deeply impressed on the minds of all the attaches of the stable on account of one of the horses coming back severely wounded.

When he had found the right man, he asked him:

"Do you think you could identify the man to whom you let the team on that occasion?"

"W'u'd Oi know me mother?" said the attendant, by way of an answer. "Oi w'u'd that."

"Very well," laughed Thad. "Come

outside and see if you see him anywhere about."

When they reached the sidewalk something had occurred in the street to attract people's attention, and there was a crowd in front of the stable, and among them was Leonard Stern, who had also turned to look at the spectacle.

"Which wan is it?" inquired the ostler, looking about.

"That is what I want you to find out," replied the detective. "See if you can pick him out of that crowd."

The man pushed his way through the crowd, and scrutinized each face critically as he went.

At the end of ten minutes he returned to where he had left Thad.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"That's the mon over there," observed the Irishman, pointing.

"Which one?"

"That wan wid a boigh hat an' loight overcoat."

"You are sure?"

"Sure as Oi am that I ivver ate potaties, sor."

"That is sufficient. Thanks. What is your name?"

"Michael Dolan."

"And a good old Irish name it is," remarked Thad, good-naturedly, entering the name in his memorandum-book. "Where do you live, Michael?"

"Noine hundhred an' siven Nointh avynoo, sor."

"Thanks. Good-day."

The man whom the attendant referred to was Leonard Stern, and the detective recorded another bit of evidence against him.

As he rejoined his companion and they started along the street, the latter inquired:

"Where is that man whom you want me to identify, Mr. Burr?"

Thad started.

In his abstraction over the discovery that Leonard was the person who had hired the team on that fatal afternoon, and was therefore most likely the murderer of Kate Stern, he had forgotten that he had asked the young man to come down for the purpose of identifying another person. And now that it was recalled to his mind he was in a quandary for a moment how to answer the question.

He was not long in seeing his way out of his difficulty, however, and he determined upon a bold stroke.

He would take the young man back and have him face Dolan, and see how he would deport himself. Perhaps he would break down and confess everything.

"Why, yes," he said. "We have gone past the place. I was so absorbed with what that fellow was telling me awhile ago that I forgot all about it."

And he turned upon his heel and started to retrace his steps.

As they again neared the livery stable Thad watched Leonard's countenance for any sign of agitation, but was again disappointed.

There was not the least indication of nervousness or weakness.

"Is this the place?" he asked as Thad again paused in front of the stable.

"Yes. Come in," was the detective's reply as he made his way inside.

Leonard followed him with a puzzled expression, and when they were inside Thad asked for Dolan.

As the liveryman approached them, the detective again watched the young man's face, but only to see that he regarded the stableman with the utmost indifference.

"This is the man I was telling you about," observed Thad, when Dolan came before them, turning to Leonard.

"Do you remember hiring a team of this man on Friday afternoon last, Mr. Stern?"

"I remember that I did nothing of the kind," replied the young man with the utmost coolness. "Of him or anybody else. The fact is, I hired no team on that day at all, and I am quite sure that I never hired a team from this establishment in my life."

Thad looked at the Irishman for an answer to this denial, and found him standing with his mouth wide open, too much astonished to speak.

"How is that, Mike?" asked Thad. "You told me that this gentleman got a team of you on that day, that you were sure of it."

"So Oi am, sor," rejoined Mike, earnestly.

The detective now glanced at Leonard, and saw that his face was aglow with indignation.

"Do you say that I hired a team here on last Friday?" he demanded angrily.

"Oi do, sor," replied Mike, firmly. "An' it's a purty state yez left thim in! Wan of the horses shot t'rough the jaw, an' both o' thim that blowed that they could hairdly sthand an' their foor legs. An' it's not the furrest toime yez hov hoired horses here, but it's the lasht toime, Oi'm thinkin'."

While the hostler was speaking Leonard was grinding his teeth with suppressed rage, and when he concluded the young man glared at him and said:

"Well, all I've got to say is that you are the coolest liar for an ignorant man I ever met!"

"Ignorant, is it?" roared the irate Irishman, spitting on his hands and jumping up and cracking his heels together. "Ignorant, is it? An' a loiar? Hurroo! Let me at him! Nivver was the mon that could tell me thot to me own face widout havin' the mug av him smashed! Let me at him!"

"Never mind, Mike," interposed Thad, holding the indignant fellow back with difficulty. "You may be mistaken, and whether you are or not, you will have an opportunity of proving it in court before long."

"Faix, an' Oi'll shwaer it an' all the crucifixes yez kin bring befoor me. Me oyes was nivver mistaken yit, sor! Oi know that's the mon."

Indignant as he was, Leonard made no response to this, but bit his lip and turned away.

When they were upon the street again, Stern turned upon the detective with more indignation than he imagined him capable of, and asked:

"What does this mean, sir? You request me to come down here to identify a party, and I find that you simply want the party to identify me!"

Thad saw that there was no need of disguising matters any longer, and replied:

"That is about it, Mr. Stern. It was a painful duty, and we detectives are compelled to do a great many painful things."

"Then you suspect me of being guilty of the crime?"

"I am sorry to say that there is a good deal to make me suspect you, although I still hope that you are innocent."

CHAPTER XII.

BEWILDERING CLUES.

BURR was extremely anxious about the fate of the girl who had been abducted from the house on Thirteenth street, but as there was not the slightest clue to start upon to find her, he was compelled to let her case rest for the present, hoping that some light might come out of the other investigations he was compelled to make.

His first care was for the case of Leonard Stern.

Every step he had taken thus far had added one more link to the chain of circumstantial evidence which he was gradually twining about the young man, and he firmly believed that a few more strokes would weld it so firmly that there would be no escape.

In reality there was but one more thing to prove to make the evidence complete, and that was to prove that he did not go to Chicago on that Friday afternoon, and this could only be ascertained beyond the possibility of a doubt by going in person to Chicago.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he determined to make the trip without delay.

All this had passed through his mind as he was on his way up-town in company with Leonard Stern, and as a consequence both men were silent for a good part of the way, and it was Stern who broke the silence at last by way of a rather tardy answer to the detective's last remark.

"However," he began, "in spite of appearances, there is one thing which I have to fall back upon."

"What is that?"

"An alibi," replied Leonard, with an ex-

pression of satisfaction. "All your circumstantial evidence will be swept away by that."

"That is true enough, my young friend—if you can establish it, and nobody hopes any more sincerely than I that you may be able to do it."

"There is no question about it," rejoined the young man lightly. "No less than a dozen friends met me on my arrival in Chicago and then there is the record of my sleeping-car berth. There will be no trouble about it."

"I hope not, but you cannot blame me for investigating the matter thoroughly?"

"Certainly not, and if you need any help in the matter, I will be only too glad to give it."

"Thank you. You can be of a good deal of aid to me."

"In what way?"

"First, tell me what road you went over."

"The Central."

"Very well," said the detective, making a note in his book. "Now give me the names of some of the friends in Chicago who you say met you upon your arrival there."

Leonard called off the names of six or seven people, with their addresses, and they were as rapidly recorded in the detective's note-book.

An hour later he arrived at the Grand Central Depot and went at once to the sleeping-car agent's office. Here he inquired whether a berth had been secured by a man by the name of Leonard Stern on Friday, the 15th of October, and was informed that there had.

This was one point for Leonard, but the detective was far from satisfied, and secured a berth for himself.

The next afternoon he arrived in Chicago, and went to the Auditorium Hotel, where Leonard boarded when at home.

He asked the clerk if Leonard Stern was at home, by way of beginning operations, and was informed, of course, that he was not.

"He is in New York," said the clerk.

"Ah," returned Thad. "When did he go?"

"Let me see. Oh, yes, I can tell you," and he referred to his ledger. "He left here on the night of October 15th, just a week ago to-day."

"I am surprised at that," observed the detective, with feigned astonishment, "for I saw him in New York on the 14th."

"That is likely, for he got back here on the 15th from New York, and, finding a telegram from his father that his step-mother was dead, he took the next train back."

"Of course there is no use for me to ask you if there is any chance of there being a mistake about this?"

"Certainly not. However, if you doubt my word, here is his name in his own handwriting on the register," pursued the clerk, turning over the leaves of the book till he came to the date. "Regular boarders do not always register, but he is particular about that and always does. He says it often fixes a date in his mind which would otherwise escape his memory."

Thad examined the signature, and saw that it was the handwriting he had seen in the two letters written by Leonard.

This appeared to settle the question of an *alibi*, but he was still unsatisfied, and called upon several of the friends of the young man, and in each case he was told that Leonard had arrived on the afternoon of the 15th.

At the conclusion of it all he was forced to believe that he had actually been there on that date, and consequently could not have been at Riverside Drive, New York, and therefore must be innocent, and the detective took the next train back to the city, where he arrived late the next evening.

So at the end of a week's hard work he was no nearer a solution of the mystery than he was at the beginning.

Having found the only man at whom the suspicion pointed innocent, he must begin all over again, which was far from a cheerful prospect, to say the least.

During the following day he visited the hospital to ascertain what progress the patient was making, and was informed that he was rapidly recovering, that, indeed, he

had sane lapses in which he conversed rationally.

Fortunately he was in one of these conditions when Thad visited the hospital, and by permission of the head nurse, he had a talk with the injured man.

Although he talked rationally upon most subjects, he either could not or would not reveal his name.

"It is the strangest case I ever saw," remarked the doctor, who came in while the detective was there. "He seemed to remember everything else, but he has either forgotten his own name or has some motive for keeping it a secret."

"The latter is the case, most likely," returned Thad. "In my opinion he had more to do with the tragedy than having his head punched."

"I shouldn't wonder," rejoined the doctor.

As soon as the detective approached the patient's bedside he looked up and stared long and earnestly at Thad's face, and finally said:

"I know you. You are the man that came here with the man with the black eyes."

"That is correct," replied Burr. "So you remember the man with the black eyes, do you?"

"Remember him? How can I ever forget him? Did he not try to kill me?"

"So he did. Do you know his name?"

"His name?" and the patient appeared to be searching his memory for something that was lost.

At length his face brightened, and he continued:

"His name? His name? Yes, yes. I know it! It is Stern!"

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes, I am sure. Stern is his name."

"What is his first name?"

"Let me see. Yes, Leonard. That is it. Leonard Stern."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"Meet him?"

And he appeared to be ruminating again.

"Yes, yes, I know now. I met him in a city," he exclaimed.

"What city?"

"Chicago."

"How did he come to strike you?"

"He struck me on the head," muttered the patient scowling darkly.

"I know he struck you on the head. But how came he to do it?"

"He wanted to kill me, and he did kill the girl."

"What girl?"

"The girl that was in the carriage, and the horses went over the rocks, and he threw the girl over the rocks! Oh, it was awful! The poor girl begged for her life, but he would not listen to her, and threw her over the rocks."

"But what was the girl's name?"

"The girl?"

"Yes."

"Her name?"

"Yes. What was her name?"

"The girl's name! That's good! The girl's name! Ha! ha! ha! Why, she had no name. Who ever heard of a girl having a name?"

"What is your name, then?"

"My name?"

And he knitted his brows and appeared to be trying to think.

"You say the girl has no name, what is yours?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "My name? Why, man, I am like the girl, I have no name. Who ever heard of me having a name? Call me Mister if you like, or Colonel. That's a good name. Call me Colonel. Ha! ha! ha! I'm the Colonel from this out."

The poor lunatic went off into one of his insane fits again, and the detective left him.

Thad next called upon Mrs. Shelby in Thirteenth street.

"Where have you been all this time?" were her first words. "You should have come here the next day after you were here."

"Why, have you seen any more of our fine gentlemen?" he asked.

"Indeed, I have; they were here the very next day."

"What did they want?"

"They wanted some letters that belonged to Kate, which she left here, but they didn't get them, I can tell you."

"Have you the letters?"

"Yes, I kept them, as I didn't know but you might make something of them, although they seemed to be nothing but love-letters."

"Let me see them, please."

The old woman hobbled off into another room, and soon returned with a bundle of letters, and handed them to the detective.

The moment his eyes fell upon the direction of the first envelope, he was startled.

It was addressed to Katherine Sherwood and was in the well-known handwriting of Leonard Stern.

A perusal of several of the letters proved the old woman's surmise that they were nothing but love-letters to be correct. They threw no light upon the mystery surrounding this unknown woman, but rather deepened it.

That she was not the real Kate Stern, there was not the shadow of doubt in the detective's mind, and the question with him was who was she, how came she in possession of all these things which had once been the property of the murdered woman, and what object had she in keeping them?

If she was an adventuress and an impostor, how was it that she had been forcibly abducted by these villains?

In glancing over the letters casually he had not thought of looking at the dates, taking it for granted that they had all been written a long time before, and he probably would not have thought of it had not his attention been called to it.

"What do you think of them?" asked Mrs. Shelby, smiling.

"I see nothing interesting or valuable about them," he replied. "They were evidently written by a man by the name of Leonard Stern, whom I know very well, to a young woman by the name of Katherine Sherwood, who is now dead, and who, at the time of her death, was the wife of this same Leonard Stern's father. The young man was betrothed to her for some time before his father married her, and these letters were evidently written during their engagement. The only thing that puzzles me, is how they came in the possession of this young woman."

The old woman got up and came over to where Thad was sitting, took the package and, after running them over, selected one and handed it to him.

"Read that," she said.

The detective unfolded it, and was startled to note that it was of quite recent date—written the day the girl was abducted, in fact.

It was as follows:

"DEAR KATE:—

"Keep out of sight for the present and all will be well. Our plot thus far has worked like a charm. Let nobody know where you are, and above all, avoid P. & Q. They mean no good to either of us. If they can only entice you away so that you will be beyond my reach there is no telling what may happen. Remain where you are for the present. You are safe there, but if you wish to see me, slip away and come to Lil's, any night after ten o'clock.

"Affectionately,
"LEN."

The detective was puzzled.

"What do you think of it?" asked the old woman.

"I do not know what to think of it," he replied. "It seems that this letter was written since she has been here. Do you know of her receiving any letters?"

"No, and that's what puzzles me. It is addressed to this number, as you see, but I never knew of her getting a letter. She must have watched the postman and got it without my knowledge."

"Do you know anything about this 'Len,' Mrs. Shelby?"

"Never heard of him."

"Has nobody been here to see her since she came?"

"Nobody but the two men you saw here the other night."

"Did she ever appear to expect any one, or say that she expected any one?"

"No, she never spoke about expecting any one at all, and the subject never passed between us but once, and that was when Paul Berwick called the first time and asked for her. I went up to her room and told her that there was a gentleman to see her, and

she told me to tell him that she was not in. And then when I started to tell her, she called me back and said: 'Tell everybody that calls the same thing. I am never at home. I don't want to see anybody.'"

"You told Berwick that she wasn't in, did you?"

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"That he didn't believe it, that he knew she was here. I asked him how he knew, and he said that a particular friend of hers had received a letter from her saying that she was here."

"He did not mention who this friend was?"

"No."

"Did you ask him?"

"Yes, but he put me off by saying that it was a very particular friend."

"Have you any idea who this 'Lil' alluded to in the letter, is, or where he or she lives or is to be found?"

"I do not know positively, but I have an idea. There is a Lily Dare who lives in Fifteenth street, and this fellow Paul Berwick used to go there."

"Who do you imagine the writer refers to as 'P. & Q.' in this letter?"

"I think it is the two men you saw here the other night."

"But the writer warns her against them. If this Lil's is a place frequented by Berwick, it is not likely that he would advise her to go there."

"It's a mixed up affair all round," sighed the old woman in dire perplexity. "I don't pretend to understand it."

"Nor I, but I shall endeavor to untangle the knot. I shall make a call at Lil's at once."

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GAME.

BEFORE proceeding to the house in Fourteenth street, Thad deemed it best to disguise himself, as he might meet Berwick or the doctor, and he did not desire that they should know him.

He therefore went home and made himself up to resemble a successful sporting man, with a heavy dark mustache and pointed beard, and attired himself in a natty suit.

He then made his way to the house, which he found, to his surprise, to be an ordinary boarding-house, kept by an old woman.

The inmates of the house were mostly gamblers and actresses, and the house as a consequence did not bear a very good name.

His first move was to inquire for Lillian Dare, and when that lady entered the parlor, he found her to be a ponderous person with a face that showed unmistakable signs of dissipation.

Indeed, as he afterward learned, she had been a variety actress in times gone by.

After introducing himself under a fictitious name, the detective informed the lady that he was looking for a lady friend, whom he had heard was stopping at her house.

"What is the lady's name?" asked Lillian.

"Her maiden name was Kate Sherwood," replied Thad. "But I believe she has been married since I last saw her, and her present name is Stern."

"There is no such person stopping here," answered the woman promptly.

Thad was disappointed.

However, he thought that there was a possibility of the young woman going under an assumed name, if, indeed, the name that he had asked for was not assumed one.

"That may not be her right name," he resumed at length. "The young lady I want is about nineteen, with dark brown curly hair and large brown eyes and is rather pretty."

The old woman shook her head.

"I don't know her by that description," she observed. "Do you know any of her friends?"

A happy thought occurred to the detective, and a way out of his dilemma seemed to open before him.

"Yes," he said. "If she is here, she probably came with Paul Berwick or Doctor Hulsted, or both."

"Oh, that girl?" interposed the old woman. "Yes, she came here a few nights ago with them, and is still here, but she is

not very well, and I don't think she will see any one."

"You say she has been here for a few days. About how many days has she been here?"

"Let me see. She came here three days ago, or rather three nights ago."

"Has she had any other visitors besides Berwick and the doctor?"

"She has had one caller, but she refused to see him."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know his name."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall and good-looking."

"Dark eyes and mustache?"

"Yes."

"Resemble Berwick somewhat?"

"Yes, very much."

"Whom did he inquire for?"

"He asked for Kate Berwick."

"And she refused to see him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he give his name?"

"Yes, but I have forgotten what it was."

"Would you remember it if you were to hear it?"

"Perhaps."

"Was it Stern?"

"No, that wasn't it."

The young man was evidently masquerading under a false name, thought the detective.

"Has the young lady given you positive orders not to admit anybody to her?" he asked after a moment's silence.

"Yes, she says she won't see anybody."

"She sees Berwick and the doctor, of course?"

"No, she won't see even them."

"Has she never seen them since she came here?"

"Only once, the next day after she came, and they had a row in the room, and after they went away she told me that if they called again to tell them she wasn't here any longer."

"Did they call again soon after that?"

"Yes; the same afternoon."

"And you told them that she was out?"

"I told them that she had gone. They asked me where, and I told them I did not know."

"What did they say to that?"

"They growled a good deal, didn't want to believe me, and finally had a good deal of talk between themselves, during which they speculated as to where she had probably gone."

"Now, tell me, Miss Dare, do you know anything about this young woman?"

"I never saw her before she came here that night."

"Nor the tall young man who called for her, either?"

"No, sir; I never saw him before."

"That seems strange, for he wrote to her that if she wanted to see him to meet him here. How do you account for that?"

"I cannot account for it."

"Well, look here, Miss Dare. I wish you would see if you cannot secure me an interview with this young woman. I have an important message to deliver to her, and if you can induce her to see me for a few seconds I will pay you well for your trouble."

"Why don't you write your message and let me take it to her?" inquired the woman, with a suspicious expression.

"That won't do. It must be delivered to her verbally, or not at all."

The old woman reflected a few moments, and finally asked:

"What name shall I give?"

Thad was exuberant at the prospect of his success, and hastened to reply:

"Don't give any name. Say it is the gentleman who tried to protect her the other night at Mrs. Shelby's. I think that will be sufficient?"

As he uttered the last words, he took the woman's hand and slipped a ten-dollar bill into it.

She became extremely gracious as she felt the crisp paper in her hand, and smiling sweetly, said:

"Really, I have very little hope that she will see you, but I will do my best, you can depend upon that."

She had scarcely left the room when, to the detective's surprise, Berwick and the doctor walked in.

They glanced about the room, and the moment their eyes fell upon Thad, they hastily retreated.

He would have liked to have followed them, but the prospect of seeing the pretty unknown, which he believed would go a long way toward clearing up the mystery, superseded the other desire. Besides, he argued, he could find the men here at this house when they were wanted, and there was no need of wasting time running after them now.

A few moments later the landlady returned with a beaming countenance and informed Thad that the young woman would be pleased to see him.

"What did she say?" he asked eagerly.

"She asked me who you were, and I told her I didn't know, except that you said you were the gentleman who tried to protect her the other night at Mrs. Shelby's, and she seemed delighted, and told me to tell you to come right up."

"Good! What is the number of the room?"

"My rooms are not numbered, but it is the first room to the right after you reach the top of the stairs."

Thad waited to hear no more explanation, but arose and went up-stairs at once.

It was already quite dark, and yet the lights had not been lit in the halls, and the detective had to grope his way along the passage.

As he approached the door, he became aware of the presence of a figure standing before it.

It was too dark to discern whether it was the figure of a man or a woman, but as the person did not speak or seem inclined to move away, he realized a sense of uneasiness.

Still he walked boldly up to the door, and was about to knock, when the person demanded in a gruff voice:

"What do you want here?"

Thad felt like telling the questioner that it was none of his business, but he changed his mind and replied:

"I am going to call upon the occupant of this room, by invitation, sir."

"By invitation?" roared the other in an angry voice. "I guess not!"

"I should like to know what you have to say about it!" retorted Thad hotly.

"Well, sir, I have a good deal to say about it, for I know you have had no invitation from the occupant of that room."

"How do you know that?"

"How do I know?" cried the man indignantly. "I think I ought to know, as I occupy that room myself!"

Thad was about to retort, when the door opened, evidently in response to a former knock by the man, and he stepped in.

As the light from the room streamed out into the hall the detective made two discoveries.

One was that he had gone to the second, instead of the first door, and that the man to whom he had been talking was none other than Dr. Hulsted. He also saw that the person who had opened the door was Berwick.

This was a surprise, for the landlady had spoken about the men calling to see the young woman, and now he saw that they were either boarders or roomers in the house, and therefore her story must be untrue.

However, he did not pause to consider the matter long, but stepped back and knocked at the other door.

The door was promptly opened by a very pretty young woman, whom he recognized as the one he had seen carried from Mrs. Shelby's house in a state of unconsciousness.

"Sit down," said she, after shaking his hand. "I am so glad to see you! It was so kind of you to try to rescue me from those villains the other night!"

Thad was at a loss how to begin, and while reflecting upon what course to pursue, he looked the young lady over.

At the conclusion of his survey he concluded that if she was not the same person whom he had found suspended from the rocks, she was her twin sister, for he had never seen two persons so nearly alike.

"I have been wanting to see you so much," she pursued, seeing that he remained silent. "I was anxious to know how you

got into the house that night, and how you came to go in."

Thad related the account of his following the two men from the hotel in Eighty-first street, of overhearing the interview between them and Mrs. Shelby, and finally of his climbing up the lattice and getting in at the window.

"And all that to save me from those horrid men?"

"I do not know of a nobler cause in which I could have labored," he interposed, by way of putting himself upon good terms with her. "A lady in distress is enough to enlist the sympathy of any man who is a man."

"But to think that you should have done that for me, whom you knew nothing about!"

"That made no difference to me."

The detective saw that she was inclined to gossip interminably, and it would be necessary to switch her off.

"You will excuse my impertinence, Miss Berwick, if I ask you how you came in that house?" he began. "You did not belong there, of course?"

"No, I did not belong there," she replied. "I just went there to get away from some persons whom I dislike."

"Who are these people?"

"That I do not care to tell."

"Mrs. Shelby told me that you informed her that you had been married. Is that true?"

The young woman blushed.

"Did the old gossip tell you that?" she said, laughing.

"She did. She said that you claimed to have been married to a man named Stern."

"I believe I did tell her something of the kind," she returned, still laughing.

"It isn't true, then?"

"I would rather not answer that," she faltered, growing confused.

"Do you know a man by the name of Stern?"

"Yes—at least I used to know a young man by that name."

"Leonard Stern?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No, not for a long time."

"You have had some communication with him, though, haven't you?"

"He has written to me, but I have not answered his letters."

"In one of his latest letters he advised you to come here?"

"Yes, I think he did. But how did you know about this letter?"

"Mrs. Shelby showed it to me."

"The old humbug! What business had she showing my letters?" pouted the young woman.

"I was anxious to know what had become of you, and asked her for the letters in the hope that they would throw some light on the subject."

"And it was through the mention of this place that you came here, eh?"

"Yes. But tell me, who are these men, and what is their object in persecuting you?"

"I am unable to answer either question. I do not know them, and have no idea why they want to persecute me. I have never done anything to them."

"Are you still in their power?"

"No, not now. I am safe here. They do not dare to approach me here."

"Have you no home to which you can go?"

"Not now. I once had."

"What is your right name?"

"You called it a moment ago," she laughed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUBTLE WOMAN.

THAD began to realize that the young woman was not telling him the truth.

He could see that she was very subtle, and there could be no doubt that she was concealing the real facts about herself and those connected with her, and he determined to act a little more sternly with her.

"You tell me that you are safe in this place. How can that be, when those men who you say are persecuting you are stopping here?"

"Stopping here?" she echoed, with a look of consternation and astonishment.

"Yes. Were you not aware of it?"

"I was not. In fact, I can hardly credit it, as the landlady told me this morning that they had called to see me. I do not see why she should have told me that if they were stopping in the house."

"They are, nevertheless."

"Have you seen them?"

"Yes. I came very nearly getting into their room."

"Where is their room?"

"The next one to your own."

"You don't tell me?"

"It is true."

"They must have come in to-day, then, for a young lady occupied that room yesterday."

There was such a show of sincerity about her conversation and manner now that he was inclined to believe her.

"However, these men occupy the room now," he went on, "and this being the case, I should think it would be better for you to go somewhere else—say back to the old lady where you were stopping before."

"It would be better, I have no doubt," she assented. "And I shall think about it."

"There is another thing I would like to ask you about, Miss Berwick."

"What is that?"

"You bear the same name as one of your persecutors. Are you any relation to him?"

"None whatever," she replied almost indignantly.

"Pardon me, but the coincidence impressed me, and I thought there was no harm in speaking of it. Perhaps you have no objection in telling me why you told Mrs. Shelby that you had been married to a man by the name of Stern?"

"A mere freak, I suppose," replied the girl with a supercilious toss of her head.

"The old gossip was asking me all kinds of silly questions, and I told her that to get rid of her and give her something to talk about."

"But in reality you were never married to any such person?"

"Certainly not, or to anybody else for that matter."

"One more thing, Miss Berwick."

"Well?"

"You have in your possession a locket of peculiar design, I believe?"

She started and colored, but did not answer.

Affecting not to notice her confusion, the detective continued:

"The locket I speak of, if I am not mistaken, has the arms of the Stern family on one side, and the legend, 'The Fatal Charm' on the other."

She opened her eyes very wide at this declaration, stared at the detective inquiringly for a moment and then asked:

"How did you come to know so much about my affairs, and what motive have you for asking me all these questions?"

"Oh, having made an effort to save your life, I thought I had some claim upon your friendship, and presumed to ask you these things because I am very curious about them."

"Is that your only reason?"

"Certainly. What other could I have?"

"That is what I would like to know."

"By the way, if I am not mistaken, that locket was once the property and an heirloom of the Stern family."

"Possibly."

"How came it in your possession?"

"I haven't admitted that it is in my possession yet," she retorted dryly.

"That was unnecessary, as I knew it already."

"Mrs. Shelby told you, I suppose?"

"She did, but she is not the only one."

"Then I want to tell you that you have been misinformed, sir. I have no such locket in my possession. It is one of that old gossip's lies. You shouldn't put so much faith in what she tells you."

"I am not usually unduly credulous of what people tell me," rejoined Thad coolly, "but I am bound to believe the old woman for the reason that she could have known nothing of that locket if she had not seen it on you. It is an heirloom of the Stern family and nobody outside of the family and intimate friends could know anything about it, much less describe it accurately as she did."

The girl's face had been undergoing all

sorts of colors and expressions while he was delivering this speech, and at the conclusion she burst out laughing.

"I have made a discovery," she declared.

"A discovery?"

"Yes. You are a detective, and all this catechizing has been for the purpose of finding out something about me. Am I not right?"

"You were never more mistaken in your life. At the same time I have an object in wanting to know where you obtained that locket, and it may be to your advantage to tell me, instead of having a detective to get hold of you and wring the information from you."

"But suppose I still adhere to my assertion that I have no such locket in my possession?"

"That will avail you nothing. They will find out the truth, if they have to search you in order to do it."

"I would like to see any of them try it," she cried bristling up and her dark eyes flashing angrily.

"They would have no hesitancy in doing it. But we are getting away from the subject. Will you, or will you not tell me where you got that locket?"

"I will not, and for the simple reason that I have no locket," she replied, firmly.

"Then there is but one thing for me to do, and that is to put the matter into the hands of the police," said Thad, rising.

The girl hesitated, turned pale and red alternately, and finally faltered:

"Please don't do that, sir, and I will not only tell you all I know about it, but will show you the locket."

"Very well," said the detective, turning back eagerly.

"But not now," she interjected.

"Not now?"

"No, but if you will come see me to-morrow I will tell you all, and show you the locket."

"Why not now?"

"For two reasons. One is that I am pledged not to say anything about the affair while I remain in this house, and the other is that the locket is not in my possession now. To-morrow I will leave here, and also get the locket, and then when you call upon me I will give it to you, and you can return it to the owners, and I will give you all the information in my possession."

"Information about what?"

"About anything you want to know."

"Where will you be to-morrow?"

"At Mamma Shelby's."

"Sure?"

"Can't you trust me?"

Thad looked her squarely in the eyes, and as she did not quaver under his scrutiny, he decided that he could trust her.

"Yes, I will trust you," he said; "but if you deceive me, it will be the worst for you. But before I go there is one piece of information you can give me. You bear a striking resemblance to a lady who was killed a little over a week ago, Mrs. Katherine Stern, formerly Miss Sherwood. Did you know her?"

"I did not," she replied, and there was an expression of such perfect innocence on her face that he was constrained to believe her.

"Did Leonard never say anything about her to you?"

"Never."

"That is strange, as she was his sweetheart at one time, and they were engaged to be married."

Thad watched her countenance, but if this information produced any emotion in her, she did not exhibit it outwardly.

He then took his leave, and half an hour later called upon Leonard Stern.

"Well, what is new?" asked the young man, as soon as they were seated.

"I have made a good many discoveries," rejoined the detective, "but none of them of much value to me."

"Did you go to Chicago?"

"Yes."

"Everything straight in that direction?"

"It seems to be."

"You found that my claim to being able to establish an alibi was well founded, didn't you?"

"Yes, that is all right; but I have made some discoveries since my return that do not look well for you."

"What are they?"

"You remember my speaking of a young woman who was abducted by the two men, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have found her and had a talk with her."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and she tells me that she knows you."

"Knows me?"

"Yes."

"She is mistaken," rejoined the young man, indignantly. "I never heard of the person until you told me about her."

"That is strange. She has quite a number of letters which she claims were written by you to her."

"Then her claim in that direction is as false as the other one, for I have never written to a young lady in my life, except Kate."

Thad drew out the last letter she had received from him and handed it to him.

"Do you know anything about that letter?" he asked. "You remark that her name is Kate also."

Leonard took the letter and coolly glanced over it without the sign of a tremor.

"Yes, I have seen the letter," he replied.

"In fact I wrote it—to Kate Sherwood. I wonder how this woman got possession of it."

Instead of replying to the inquiry, Thad asked:

"How long since you wrote that letter, Mr. Stern?"

"I don't remember—six months, I guess. The date will show. It was—"

He hesitated and turned pale.

"By Jove! what is this?" he exclaimed.

"According to the date it has not been written six months," interposed Burr.

"No, nor six days, according to the date. There is some trickery about this. This date has been altered!"

Thad took the letter and examined the date carefully, and discovered something that had escaped him before.

There was no doubt that the original date had been erased and the present one interpolated. It was perfectly plain, as the thing had been done in a clumsy manner.

"You are right," he admitted. "That acquits you, but only deepens the mystery. Who could have done this, what could have been his object and how did he get hold of the letter?"

"That is a puzzle, for Kate always kept her letters from me in the cabinet."

"Still, there is one mystery which you may be able to explain for me, Mr. Stern."

"What is that?"

"Where was Miss Sherwood at the time this letter was written?"

"At her aunt's."

"Where did her aunt live?"

"In Thirteenth street."

"At the number given on this envelope?"

"Yes."

"What was she doing there, and what danger was she in, that you should have said that she was safe where she was?"

"She was being persecuted by a female cousin, who used to follow and insult her whenever she went out. I advised her to go to her aunt's, because the cousin did not know where the aunt lived and could not persecute her while there."

"What do you mean by saying that your plot was working like a charm?"

"I had reference to the plot of sending her to her aunt's, and letting it be understood that she was out of the city."

"Another thing. What do you mean by telling her that if she wished to see you, she might go to Lil's?"

"That is a cousin of mine on my mother's side. Her name is Wood—Lily Wood. She lived in Fourteenth street, not a great way from Kate's aunt."

"Does this aunt still live in Thirteenth street?"

"No, she is dead, and her little house was sold to some one, I do not know whom."

"Who do you mean by 'P. & Q.' in this letter?"

"That refers to her cousin and her husband. That was a nickname she and I had for them."

"What has become of this cousin?"

"They left here some months ago and went to California, I think."

"How old a woman was this cousin?"

"About Kate's own age, I should say."

"Pretty?"

"I believe she was, although I never saw her."

"Did you ever hear Kate say that she resembled her?"

"It seems to me that she did say something about it."

"What was this cousin's name?"

"Kate Berwick."

"Ah!" ejaculated Burr, thrilled by the information. "Some relation to Paul Berwick, perhaps?"

"That I cannot say. I did not know him at that time."

"Do you know of any one who could identify this woman?"

"Kate Berwick?"

"Yes."

"I presume my sister could do it. I think she has seen her, although I am not positive as to that?"

"Will you ask her, please?"

"With pleasure."

Leonard left the room, and soon returned with the information that his sister believed she would know Kate Berwick anywhere, and would accompany the detective at any time which would be suitable to him and identify the woman.

"Very well, tell your sister that we will go to-morrow afternoon," said Burr, rising to take his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

A THRILLING EXPERIENCE.

It still wanted a quarter of an hour to midnight when Burr left Leonard Stern, and concluded to pay another visit to the boarding-house of Miss Lily Dare.

A light was still streaming from the parlor window as he approached the house, and he knew that he was all right.

The door was promptly opened in response to his ring, and the attendant vouchsafed the information that the landlady was still in the parlor where the detective had left her several hours before.

She was entertaining some theatrical friends who had just returned from their duties on the stage, but was too anxious to know the result of the detective's interview with Miss Berwick to keep him waiting long, and soon came over and sat down beside him.

She did not know that he had been out of the house since the interview, and began to rally him good-naturedly on the length of his visit.

"You must have found the young lady extremely entertaining," she laughed.

"Fairly so," was his response, "but you must not suppose that I have been with her all this time."

"No?" she exclaimed in great surprise.

"No, I have been away for some time. I paid a visit to her friend, the tall man you told me about."

"You know him, then?"

"Very well. His name is Stern, but I am inclined to think you were either mistaken in the name, or else the party who called was not the same."

"What was the matter with the young man changing his name for the occasion? I've known of stranger things than that."

"True enough. But what I want to tell you is that the young woman is going to leave the house in the morning, and I would like to have you find out, if you can, where she goes."

"All right. I'll find out before you go to-night, if she hasn't gone to bed."

"Thanks. Another thing."

"What's that?"

"You told me this evening that Berwick and Hulsted had called on the young woman—"

"I said that they had called to see her, but that she would not see them."

"Yes, I know. And I understood from that that they lived somewhere outside of your house, whereas I have discovered that they live in your house."

"Not permanently. They asked me to let them have a room for to-night as they wished to see one of my roomers who is an actor and would not be home till midnight."

You see these gentlemen live somewhere in New Jersey when at home."

"That was what they claimed as their reason for wanting to stay all night, but let me tell you, they had some other object in view."

"Why do you think so?"

"Are you not aware that when they brought that girl here, they brought her by force?"

"Impossible!"

"It is true."

"It is funny she said nothing to me about it."

"Perhaps she did not want you to know that, but she told you she would not see them, did she not?"

"Yes."

"Did not that cause you to suspect that something was wrong?"

"No, I never bother my head about these affairs. Girls have so many freaks that I never know what to expect of them. However, I promised her that these men should not be admitted to her room without her orders, and they have been told ever since that she was not in."

"Nevertheless, they know that she is in the house, and that is their business here to-night—to make another attempt to carry her off, and my opinion is that they will take her to some place this time where she will not be able to exclude them from her room."

"Good gracious! Do you think so?"

"I am almost sure of it."

"Well, I'll go up at once and put her on her guard," declared the stout landlady, and flounced out of the room without taking time to excuse herself.

Burr waited patiently for the space of fifteen minutes, the time necessary for the lady to ascend and descend the stairway, and then she returned puffing for breath and greatly excited.

"We are too late!" she exclaimed, dropping into a chair.

"Too late?"

"Yes, the whole party is gone!"

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? Wasn't I just up there, and didn't I find both doors wide open and the whole gang gone? In my opinion that woman didn't require much forcing, either, for if she wanted to, she could have made noise enough to have aroused the house before they got out."

"They may have given her something to render her insensible, as they did when they brought her here."

"Do you mean to say that she was insensible when they brought her here?"

"She appeared to be when I saw her."

"Well, when she reached here she was as sensible as you or me, and walked up-stairs of her own accord."

"Why did she refuse to see them afterward, then?"

"Oh, that was only a blind, or else she may have got a cranky spell on her. But you may rest assured that there was no forcing about it this time."

"I fear you are right, but at the same time it is my duty to go after her and find out the truth about it."

"I shouldn't bother my head about it if I was you. Any way, how do you know which way they went?"

"That I can only surmise, but I am off anyway."

And the next moment the detective was in the street.

He stood looking up and down the street for a moment, wondering which way to go, when a small boy came up to him and said:

"Dat's de way dey went, mister," pointing east.

"Who?" he asked, thinking the lad meant some one else.

"De lady an' de two gents," replied the boy. "De lady was purty, an' one o' de gents was er old man an' de udder a tall young feller."

"Did they come out of this house?"

"Yep. De way I know'd dem, dey was de same ones w'at comed here de udder night, an' de lady didn't want'er go in, an' de gents had ter make her."

"Did they have to make her go to-night?"

"Purty near it, she didn't want'er go fer er cent."

"Were they afoot?"

"Nope, dey got inter a carriage here at de curb."

Thad's heart sunk.

There was little or no chance of overtaking them now, if they had gone off in a carriage, even if he had known the route they had taken.

Nevertheless he put off on foot in the direction they had gone, and walked rapidly for several blocks.

He had no definite object in view, but felt that he must be moving, and the first thing he realized, he was below Avenue A, and in one of the worst neighborhoods in the city.

Only for this fact it is not likely that he would have noticed a neat closed carriage standing in front of a dingy-looking tenement, but the vehicle looked too respectable for the locality and his suspicions were aroused at once.

Crossing over to the same side of the street, he soon came up to the carriage, and saw the driver sitting on the box apparently waiting for some one.

Burr stole alongside the vehicle and was about to question the driver, when a slender hand came out of the window and dropped a scrap of paper.

It was too dark inside the carriage for him to see any one, but he picked up the scrap and strolled on in an indifferent way till he came to a saloon where there was a brilliant light in the window, and here he unfolded the paper and examined it.

There were a few lines scrawled in pencil, and must have been written in the dark from the manner in which the lines ran on top of each other.

With some difficulty he finally made out to read it, and it was as follows:

"DEAR MR. BAKER (that was the name Thad had introduced himself by at the boarding house):—I am a prisoner in the hands of those horrid men again. You tried to rescue me once, and I hope you will try it again. If you do not, I do not know what will become of me. The men have gone into this tenement to make arrangements for the people to keep me, and I hope you will follow me and rescue me, if possible. I will then tell you all, even the secret of the murder in Riverside Park.
KATE."

When he had finished the note he turned to look back at the carriage, and saw that four men had come out of the house, two of them appeared to be the doctor and Berwick and the other two were about the toughest two citizens you would care to look at.

They lost no time in opening the carriage door and hustling the woman out, and before the detective was half way back to the vehicle they had her inside the door.

Realizing his disadvantage in a contest with these four powerful men, he looked about for a policeman to assist him, but, as usual when they are wanted, no policeman was in sight.

His only chance, therefore, would be in strategy, and he knew that never failed him, so he entered the hall door after the men, who had already gone in with the young woman in their midst.

It was a cheap tenement, and the smell that met his nostrils as he entered the door well-nigh took him off his feet; but he was accustomed to encountering that sort of thing, and did not hesitate on that account.

The party were already ascending the stairs at a rapid gait, and from all appearances, the woman was going along as willingly as any of them.

Nevertheless, she might have thought it the best policy to do that, as resistance was useless.

Again the detective looked about for assistance, and at that moment an honest-looking man came out of one of the flats and started to go out of the front door, when Thad accosted him.

"I say, my good man," he said, "I want you to help me rescue that woman going upstairs in the clutches of those ruffians. I will pay you well for your help. Come on."

The man shook his head.

"Sure, an' it's not meself that'd be meddlin' in other payple's business," he said. "I have all I kin do to attend to me own."

And before Burr could offer a protest, the fellow had shuffled out of the building.

There was nothing for it, then, but to do whatever there was to be done single-handed, and he determined to lose no time in parley.

Meanwhile the party had climbed three flights of stairs and appeared to be waiting for a door to be opened.

Thad walked rapidly up the stairs, until he was on the landing below them, but they appeared to pay no attention to him, and he started up the last flight.

When he was about half-way up the door opened and the party entered, and the door closed upon them.

Burr soon reached the floor above, but he was no better off than when he was on the ground floor.

How was he to get into the flat to rescue the girl? was the question.

It would not do to knock and demand admittance, for either of the principals in the outrage would recognize him, and he would either be refused admittance or attacked on the spot.

There was still another flat above the one in which the people had gone, and while trying to formulate some plan of rescue for the girl, the detective climbed the remaining flight of stairs.

It was very dark up there, which led him to believe that the inmates were all in bed, but upon approaching one of the doors he found it partly open, and by pushing it further open he could see through the front window, and as nothing seemed to intervene between him and the window, he understood that the apartments were vacant.

Stepping inside and lighting a match and holding it up, he ascertained that this was true.

Taking out his dark-lantern and lighting it, he walked quietly through the flat, which consisted of some five rooms, all very dirty, and made a study of the arrangement of the rooms.

This he did so that in case he got into the flat below he would not be at a loss as to how to move.

But the question was, how was he to get into the place below?

He walked to the back window, raised it and looked out. There was a fire-escape, and his plan of operation was soon formulated.

Closing up his lantern and putting it into his pocket, he climbed out upon the fire-escape, and descended to the next balcony below. The room facing the balcony (which was probably the kitchen) was in darkness, but he could see a small ribbon of light streaming through the crack of the door opening into the front room, and he could hear loud talking coming from that direction.

He had nothing to fear, therefore, and at tempted to raise the window, but found it locked.

This did not deter him long, however, for taking the blade of a long, thin knife he always carried for such emergencies, he drove it in between the sashes and unlatched the window.

In another moment he had raised the sash and stepped in. Then he paused to listen. The talking continued in the front room, mingled with the clinking of glasses, and he concluded they were having a jollification over the recovery of the girl.

He was anxious to find out where they had put the young woman, and at the risk of being discovered, took out his lantern and shooting the slide, surveyed the surroundings.

As he had supposed, the room he had entered was a kitchen, and he tip-toed softly into the next room in front of it. This was a bedroom, with two dirty looking beds, but they were unoccupied. There was also another bedroom in front of this, which he entered and investigated.

There was but one room remaining, besides the hall-room, and that was the sitting-room where the men were drinking.

There was only the one partition now between him and the revelers, and, as the door was partially open, he could hear everything that was said.

He listened for some moments to the conversation, and soon became convinced that there were no women present, except the

girl they had just abducted, and she was silent (supposing her to be in there).

Burr now cudged his brains for a means to convey the knowledge of his presence to the girl, and in the midst of his ruminations, luck favored him.

One of the men, who appeared to be the doctor, varied the somewhat ribald conversation by remarking:

"Young woman, I guess you are sleepy. If you are, you can go in that next room and go to bed. You needn't be afraid. Nobody will harm you as long as you behave yourself."

Without a word the young woman arose and approached the door, and Thad had just time to shut off his light and jump into a closet when she opened the door and came into the room where he had been.

As she closed the door and approached the bed, Thad called out in a whisper, telling her he was there.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN A TRAP.

FORTUNATELY the girl was not in the least nervous, and did not become frightened at the sound of his voice.

In fact, she appeared to have expected that he would attempt to rescue her. She must have had this in mind when she wrote the note, for she could not have had time to write it after the detective came alongside of the carriage. She therefore signified that she knew him and was ready to act upon any suggestion he had to offer.

As soon as he learned this, Thad stepped out of the closet and came close to the girl.

"It was so good of you to follow those horrid men and try to rescue me," she whispered.

"Never mind about that now," he replied, impatiently. "What we want to do now is to devise some means of getting out of here. There appears to be but the one door leading out into the hall, and we cannot go out that way without being discovered. I came in through the back window from the fire-escape. Do you think you can go out that way?"

"Yes, yes, any way," she responded, anxiously.

"Very well, come this way. There is no time to lose. If those fellows take it into their heads to come out and watch you our chances are slim."

"Lead on, sir. I will follow you anywhere."

This was uttered in a dramatic way that was decidedly unpleasant to the detective, who detested cant, but he affected not to notice it, and started for the kitchen.

The girl followed close upon his heels, and they were soon at the back window, where he paused to instruct her how to proceed.

"When you get out on the balcony of the fire-escape," he said, "you will have to climb up to the next balcony above. The upper flat is vacant, and when we reach that we are safe."

"All right," she answered. "Shall I go first?"

"Yes, but be careful how you step as it is very dark, and one false step means death."

The girl gave vent to a low rippling laugh, and stepped boldly out upon the balcony.

Thad followed her, and to prevent suspicion as well as retard the progress of their pursuers should they come out, he put down the window.

By the time this was done the girl was climbing nimbly up the ladder to the next balcony.

So far fortune favored them. The sounds of the revelry in the front room continued, showing that there was no suspicion thus far of the escape, and our friends were soon on the upper balcony.

Thad then raised the sash of the window and the girl climbed into the back room of the vacant tenement.

"Now we are safe," he observed. "All we need fear now is alarming our enemies as we go down the stairs, and there is no need of that. Come this way, Miss Berwick."

And he led toward the door leading into the front of the flat.

A moment later they were in the front

room, the door of which had been open when Thad came in before, but he was now surprised to find it closed.

He thought nothing of that, however, as he did not know but he had closed it himself and forgotten it, but when he attempted to open it, he was still more astonished to find it locked.

"This is strange," he muttered. "I wonder who could have locked that door."

"I think I know," observed the girl. "We had just got inside down below when one of the men said he heard walking up here, and somebody ventured the suggestion that they were being watched, so the doctor ordered one of those rough fellows to come up and see. He came up, and when he returned he remarked that he saw no one, but that if there was anybody up here he would stay. I did not understand it then, but I know now that he must have locked the door."

"That is what he has done," rejoined the detective, "and we have got to break the lock."

He was about to throw his weight against the door, when he thought of a set of tools he carried in his pocket for such emergencies, and drew them out.

With a small screw-driver he was about to remove the lock, when without warning, the key, which was on the outside of the lock, was suddenly turned and the door thrust open.

There in the darkness stood the four men, each with a revolver leveled at the detective.

Thad was at a decided disadvantage, for, in addition to having no weapon in his hand, the light of the lantern which he had given the girl to hold rendered him an easy target for those in the dark.

How the men had got up-stairs so quickly was a puzzle, but they must have had their suspicions aroused by hearing the footsteps of the detective and his companion.

At all events, here they were, and they showed unmistakable indications of a desire to fight.

"Well!" cried the doctor in a hoarse voice, "this is a pretty little game, I must say; but we will checkmate it in short order. Surrender, sir!"

This peremptory command put Thad on his mettle, and he resolved upon a bold stroke.

Instead of complying with the demand, he stepped quickly back, and snatching the lantern from the girl, closed the slide in the twinkling of an eye. Then giving her a gentle push toward the rear of the flat as a hint of what he desired her to do, started in that direction as rapidly as possible, closely followed by the girl.

The action was so unexpected that the men were nonplused, and our friends were at the back window before they recovered their presence of mind.

"Now for your life!" he whispered. "If they are fools enough to follow us, we will have the drop on them. Get down the fire-escape as quickly as possible, and climb into the other flat. If we are lively enough we can make our escape through their door before they can get down."

The young woman needed no further hint, and was soon upon the balcony again, and a moment later they were descending the ladder.

As they expected and hoped, the men, who appeared to be too full of liquor to reason clearly, followed them into the back room, and when they saw the fugitives on the fire-escape, began to climb out on it, too.

Thad and his fair companion had sufficient start of them to get inside the room before any of them got down, and then Thad added the climax to his master-stroke by closing the window and locking it on the inside.

"Now if we don't make our escape," he remarked, taking the girl's arm and urging her along, "it is our own fault."

"Yes, if they haven't locked the front door," returned Kate.

"It is hardly likely that they would have thought of that in their haste."

By this time the men had come down the fire escape and were trying to open the window.

"That's one on them, anyway," laughed Burr, "and now—by Jove! you were right. They have locked the door on us. Nevertheless I will make short work of that lock."

With that he whipped out his screw-driver and began removing the screws from the lock.

Meanwhile the men at the window, who had been making a good deal of noise in attempting to open it, had become suspiciously quiet.

It was an ominous quiet that the detective did not like, for it meant mischief, and he redoubled his efforts and increased his speed to remove the lock and open the door as soon as possible, as he knew that it was only a matter of time when the villains would abandon the window and come round to the door.

He worked away with a will, and was just removing the last screw, when the sound of hurrying footsteps was heard in the hall.

The girl clutched his arm convulsively, and whispered:

"For God's sake hurry or we are lost!"

"Don't lose hope yet," he replied encouragingly. "One moment more and we will be free, and—if the worst comes to worst, we can fight."

"Yes, yes," cried Kate. "I can use a pistol. Let me have one!"

And without waiting for the detective to give her the weapon, she helped herself to a revolver from his pocket.

"Now let them come!" she cried defiantly.

A second later the men were heard descending the stairs from the hall above.

At that moment the last screw was removed from the lock and the lock fell to the floor.

With the rapidity of lightning Thad threw the door open, and beckoned the girl to follow as he prepared to fly, but he was too late.

At the very instant they were to rush out of the door, the four men sprang in front of them with drawn revolvers.

They did not find our friends unprepared this time, though, and before either of them could utter a word the sharp report of a revolver rung out on the stillness of the night, and Paul Berwick threw up his hands and reeled to the floor.

The shot was as much a surprise to Thad as it was to the men, for the pistol was in the hand of Kate, who was directly behind him, and he had no idea that she would fire so promptly.

It threw the other three men into a temporary panic, and realizing the state they were in, the detective grasped the arm of his fair charge and was about to hurry her past the panicked ruffians, when one of them, (a worthy who rejoiced in the name of "Bare-Bones Barry,") suddenly recovered his presence of mind, and, stepping in front of the retreating pair, leveled his revolver at Thad's breast, and growled:

"Not so fast, me beauties! Youse don't go jist yit, w'ile Old Bare-Bones is a-kickin'!"

A glance at the man showed him to be a cold-blooded villain, who would a little rather kill a man than eat a meal. He appeared to be a man of fifty-odd, and such portions of his face as were not covered by a dirty grizzled beard, bore testimony to former conflicts in the form of numerous scars, and to add still further to his beauty, one eye was missing.

"Youse don't go w'ile Old Bare-Bones is kickin'," he repeated.

Burr saw that there was but one thing to do in the emergency, and that was put in execution at once.

Without a word of warning, he struck out with his clinched fist, and knocked the revolver out of the old ruffian's hand, and followed it up with a sledge-hammer blow between the eyes.

Giant, as the fellow was, between his liquor and the force of the blow, he staggered back, stumbled over the prostrate form of Berwick, and fell headlong to the floor.

Taking advantage of the additional panic of the two remaining men, Thad again started to hasten by, and succeeded so well that they were at the head of the stairs before the doctor and the other ruffian were aware of it, and a moment more they would have been free.

But here they met with another obstacle.

The report of the pistol had aroused the tenants of the next floor below, who had

long since retired, and they were pouring forth into the hall by dozens to see the fun.

They all belonged to the same class as Bare-Bones Barry and his pal—namely, thieves, murderers and women of the town.

They were crowded into these tenements like herrings in a box, for the double purpose of economy and mutual protection, and it was a code of ethics among them that one man's quarrel was everybody's quarrel, and they were never so happy as when engaged in a rough-and-tumble fight.

When they crowded into the hall on this occasion, and looking up, espied a couple of well-dressed people, they knew that there was something up in which they ought to take a hand.

They were a motley lot, some of them only half-dressed, and all of them reeking with dirt and odorous with whisky and tobacco.

As the ringleader, a man of about Bare-Bones's own age, looked up, the latter gentleman was just regaining his legs after Thad's blow, and realizing that his ancient crony was in trouble, he was ready for a fight in an instant.

"W'at's de row, Bare-Bones?" demanded the fellow on the lower landing.

Barry's reply was couched in a shake of the head and a jerk of his thumb in the direction of Thad and Kate, who were about descending the stairs.

But it was enough. Bummer Burns understood it all, and growled:

"Wal, we'll soon fix dem, see?"

And spitting on his hands, he started up-stairs, and was followed by a good part of the rest of the crowd.

Burr saw that there was no chance of escape in that direction, and turned back. But when he glanced behind him, he saw that retreat in the other direction was equally out of the question.

The three men had regained their courage and were arrayed ready to meet the detective.

And then, to make matters worse, old Bummer Burns called up to his pal, Bare-Bones, again:

"W'at air dey, anyway, Bare-Bones?"

"W'y de chap's a beak an' de gal's a bit o' game w'at de beak's tryin' ter beat us outen, see?"

"Any sugar behind de game?"

"Sure."

Old Bummer turned and gave a significant wink at his followers and growled:

"Er beak, men; w'at's de lay?"

"Kill 'im! kill 'im!" shouted the crowd in a chorus. "Down wid de beak! Kill de smeller! We don't want no sleuths nosin' roun' hiar. See?"

And pell-mell, the mob began climbing the stairs at the heels of their worthy leader.

Thad realized that he was in for it, and his only way out was either hard fighting or stratagem.

Fortunately the three men on his floor were at the front of the hall, which left the way clear to the stairway leading to the flat above, which was at the rear.

Again grasping the girl's arm, he hurried her along the hall toward the rear of the house.

Here the hall was in darkness, whereas the front was somewhat lighter from the lamp inside of the room, the door of which was still open, and the lights brought into the hall by the people below.

This gave him a decided advantage, as he could pick them off with his pistol, if he chose, while their only chance of hitting him was by the merest guesswork.

He now took occasion to notice the girl for the first time since she asked him for the revolver, and was gratified to see that she was perfectly cool and collected.

"Sha'n't we stop here and give them a fight?" she asked.

"We might give them a few shots, and then retreat while they are in a panic," he replied. "But fire cautiously. We have no ammunition to waste."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when she raised her self-cocking revolver and fired three shots in quick succession, and at the last shot old Bummer Burns reeled back and rolled down-stairs.

What other damage she did could not be seen for the confusion and smoke of the pistol, and Thad did not wait to see. Nor did he waste any powder, but taking Kate's arm

they bounded up the stairs in half a dozen strides.

"Now for the flat," said he. "Once in there and the door locked, we are safe for the present. They cannot get in without breaking the door down, and that will not be healthy work for them."

A moment later they were in the vacant flat, and the door locked.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLEVER SUBTERFUGE.

It took but a few seconds for the mob to recover from their panic. The redoubtable Bummer Burns was only stunned and slightly wounded, and after rolling down-stairs, soon pulled himself together and was as fresh and ready for battle as ever, and the slight disturbance only increased their wrath and thirst for blood.

In half the time it takes to tell it the whole gang was reorganized and, with a wild yell began mounting the stairs to the fourth story with the ferocity of wild beasts.

Burr heard them coming and knew that their safety, as before, depended upon sharp practice.

"It will not take those fellows long to batter down this door," he remarked to the girl, "and we have got to devise some other means of escape."

"What shall we do?" she asked, still cool and rational. "We can't get down past that crowd now."

"Certainly not, while the mob are on the stairs, but they will not remain there long. They are coming up here as fast as they know how, and it will not be long till they will all be on this floor. In the mean time we have got to be at work."

"Well?"

"We will go down to the next flat while they are coming up here, and make our escape as we tried to do before. This time, fortunately, there will be no lock on the door to hinder our progress, but there is another thing we have got to guard against."

"What is that?"

"They must not be able to recognize us, if they should happen to see us going out."

"I don't understand you."

"Did you ever see anybody in disguise?"

"Yes, but how are we to do such a thing here?"

"We will go down-stairs. You will doubtless find some clothing belonging to some of the ruffians."

"I see."

"It may be an embarrassing thing for you to do, but you must array yourself in a suit of those clothes, put on an old slouch hat, and then we are ready for action."

"And you?"

"Never mind me. The matter of changing myself from one man to another is the simplest thing in the world."

By this time the mob was at the door, and attempting to force an entrance.

"Hurry!" cried the detective. "There is not a moment to lose."

And he pushed the girl toward the window.

As she descended the fire-escape ladder, another thought occurred to Thad.

He would prevent the possibility of the crowd coming down the same way.

He had noticed a heavy box in the flat when he was there before, and this he carried to the window and placed in a position so that he could tumble it down the ladder after him, and then started to make the descent of the ladder.

Then he pulled the box down after him so that it completely filled the passage, and there left it.

"They will have a good time of getting that out," he laughed, as he rejoined Kate on the lower balcony.

It was necessary to again resort to the knife in order to open the window, but that was the work of no more than a minute, and the window was raised and they stepped inside.

"Now for the old clothes," observed the detective, "and you cannot be too quick about it."

"It won't take me long, if I can find them," rejoined the girl, as she began looking about the closets.

She soon found a rough suit of clothes,

and as quickly removed her dress and donned the male attire.

Meanwhile Thad was not idle.

In a twinkling he pulled off his coat and turned it wrong-side out.

It was made double for just such an emergency, and from the black his garments were suddenly changed to a light drab.

The next thing was to alter the appearance of his face, and this was but a simple matter. The black wig and pointed beard were removed, and their place supplied by a tangled red wig and an equally tangled and disreputable-looking beard that covered half his bosom.

A slouch hat which he found in one of the closets supplied the place of the neat derby he had worn before, and all was ready except his boots and the upper part of his face.

A dash of water from the hydrant removed the gloss from his boots, and rendered them extremely shabby-looking, and by running his hands over them transferring the grime to his face, gave him the appearance of a very tough customer, such as the mob on the stairs might have been proud of.

He then turned his attention to the girl.

She was attired properly enough, but her face would not do.

"I will have to help you in the matter of your face, Miss Berwick," he said.

With a crayon he always carried about him he put in a number of wrinkles on her face, and then with a handful of flour which he procured in the kitchen, he rendered her hair extremely gray and venerable looking.

Hurrying to the front door, he was gratified to find it still open, and he listened.

The mob was still up-stairs, and from the walking overhead, it was evident that they had succeeded in breaking the door open and were just making their way toward the back window.

The detective looked out, and saw that none of them were on the same floor with him, and the coast was clear.

"Now is our time," he exclaimed. "We have completely outwitted them this time. Come."

The two hurried into the hall and were soon hastening down the stairs.

But they had not gone far when they noticed by the dim light that two figures stood at the bottom of the first stairway, and seemed to be standing guard.

This was something that our friends had not calculated on, and they were a little nonplused.

Kate grasped the detective's arm nervously and whispered:

"We are gone now!"

"Don't despair yet, my girl," replied Thad.

"They won't know us from Adam."

And they walked boldly down the stairs.

As soon as they came opposite the sentinel, one of them said:

"W'at's de matter, Mose? Got de beak an' de gal?"

"Yes, mine frient," rejoined the detective in excellent Hebrew dialect, taking the hint from the name applied to him by the guard.

"Dey've got dem up dere, and vill pring dem town very soon."

"How is it youse didn't stay ter see de fun out, Mose?"

"Oh, I got peesness outside," returned Thad, hurrying past his questioner lest he should be recognized.

"It seems ter me youse is in an awful hurry, Mose," shouted the ruffian. "Couldn't stop long enough ter tell er feller about it, could yer?"

But Burr did not stop to answer him. He was by this time at the street door, and he lost no time in getting out of the den.

He and his companion hurried along in silence for some distance, and, indeed, did not break the silence till they were well out of reach of the enemy.

When they had made a couple of blocks Thad hailed a passing cab.

The driver looked at the uncouth looking pair with a good deal of disdain, and inquired:

"Where d'ye want to go, Sheeney?"

"T'ree sixty-five T'irteenth street," replied the detective, still keeping up the character.

"All right. Got the money?"

"Yes, mine frient."

"Well, let's have it," growled the driver. "I don't drive the like of you without money in advance."

"Oh, mine cracious!" cried Thad, raising his hands in true sheeney style. "How mooch vas it?"

"Five dollars for you."

"Merciful Moshes! Do you want to rop me?"

"Wal, that's me price," growled the driver. "Pay it, or get out, just as you like!"

"Vell, I sphose I'll have to, but it's an awful brice."

And Burr handed him a five-dollar bill.

"Git in," cried the driver, and whipped up his team.

"Now I'll give that driver a surprise," laughed the detective as the hack rolled along.

"How is that?" asked Kate.

"You'll see."

And he proceeded to remove his disguise, and in a few minutes he had resumed his natural personality.

It was light enough by this time for the girl to see his face, and she was as much surprised as the driver could possibly be.

She stared in dismay at the detective's beardless face, and finally stammered:

"Why—why, Mr. Baker! You are not the same man that I saw yesterday at all!"

"Oh, yes, I guess I am," he laughed. "I have a way of changing my appearance, though, when it suits me, as you remarked to-night."

"But you had a full beard then."

"True enough, and I have it yet, but it is in my pocket at present, for future use."

She was silent for some moments, and appeared to be disturbed.

At length she looked up with an arch smile and observed:

"You haven't told me anything about yourself, but I have been wondering why you took so much interest in me. Tell me, aren't you a detective?"

Thad laughed.

"Why do you ask?" he inquired.

"Partly for the reason that I have stated, and partly on account of something those people said there to-night. When we were about to go down-stairs, the old fellow below asked who we were, and the other old fellow said you were a 'beak.' Now, what did they mean by that?"

"That I was a detective, I presume."

"Then I was right, you are one, aren't you?"

"Well, suppose I am, then what?" he laughed.

"Nothing, only if you are, I can guess why you have been following me."

"Well, why?"

"Because you think I had something to do with that murder."

This was a surprise. Indeed, Burr could not have been much more surprised if she had confessed outright.

"Why should I think you had anything to do with that?" he finally asked.

"I don't know, unless it was on account of those letters from Mr. Stern. But although they may look suspicious, I had nothing to do with it."

Here he thought he would catch her, in the event of her being guilty, as he began to half believe she was.

"You had nothing to do with what?" he demanded.

"The murder."

"What murder have you reference to?"

"Mrs. Stern's," she replied, and he imagined she was getting confused.

"Oh. I was not aware that it had been settled definitely that it was murder in her case. How do you know it was murder?"

Here she indulged in one of her flippant little laughs.

"Why, of course I don't really know it was murder," she replied at length. "But the papers spoke of it as that, and then I heard Mr. Stern talking about it. By the way, aren't you the Mr. Burr he told me so much about?"

Here was another and a greater surprise.

It also proved that Leonard's story about not seeing the girl for six months to be untrue.

Instead of answering her question, therefore, he said:

"In the course of our talk the other day,

Miss Berwick, I asked you if you knew Leonard Stern, and your answer was that you used to know him, leaving me to believe that your acquaintance had ceased. I then asked you if you had seen him lately, and you said 'No, not for a long time.' Is not that what you said?"

"I may have said that," she faltered, growing very red.

"It wasn't true, then?"

"Perhaps—I would rather not say," she stammered.

"But you tell me now that Leonard told you about one Detective Burr. Now, as a matter of fact, he has not known Detective Burr more than a week at the outside. So, if he told you about that person, he must have done so within the time I mention."

The girl was silent, and after a short pause Thad pursued:

"Another thing. One of those letters is dated October 17th, two days after the murder occurred. I showed the letter to Leonard, after he had told me that he had not seen you for more than six months, and he declared the letter was written more than a half a year ago, and not to you at all, but to Katherine Sherwood. How do you explain that?"

"Simply that he didn't tell the truth," she cried, pettishly.

"You insist, then, that the letter was written to you, do you?"

"Yes, sir. If it had not been, what would I be doing with it?"

"That is what I should like to know. But if it was written to you, it was written at the time indicated by the date, wasn't it?"

"I presume so, sir. Gentlemen usually date their letters at the time they write them, don't they?"

"Usually. But that is not answering my question. Was the letter written at the time the date indicates, that is, October 17th?"

"About that time, I guess. I can only tell by the date on the letter. My memory for dates is not good."

"Then what you told me about it having been a long time since you had seen Leonard was not true?"

"Yes, it was true," she snapped. "I am not in the habit of lying, I believe, sir. He could have written to me without seeing me, couldn't he?"

"Oh, certainly. But from the tone of the letter one would infer that it had not been long since you had seen him. Another thing, he advises you to keep out of sight for the present. What does he mean by that?"

"He didn't want these men to get hold of me."

"Why should they want to get hold of you?"

"I do not know."

"What does Leonard mean when he says that 'our plot is working like a charm'?"

"I don't know what he meant by that. Some nonsense, I suppose. He was always talking nonsense."

"Had you any falling out with him at any time?"

"Yes, we had a quarrel once."

"But made it up, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why was it you would not receive him at the boarding-house?"

At that moment the driver pulled up at the number Thad had given him, and the two passengers got out.

When the driver saw Thad he nearly fell off the box.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SLIPPERY CUSTOMER.

THE cab-driver stared at the detective in blank amazement for a minute or two, unable to speak.

Thad laughed at the fellow's consternation.

"I don't look much like the Sheeney who got in the cab in First avenue awhile ago, do I, cabby?" he laughed, "and whom you charged three fares?"

The driver turned white.

The face of the great detective was familiar to him, but he was not quite certain that it was he until he spoke, then he saw that he had made a bad blunder.

"Oh, Mr. Burr, I didn't know it was you,"

the fellow stammered, half frightened out of his wits.

"Otherwise you wouldn't have overcharged me, eh?"

"No, sir. The fact is, I thought—"

"That you had a defenseless old Jew with money and you would squeeze him, eh?" interrupted Thad.

"Not that exactly," whined the driver, "but you know there are so many crooks down in that neighborhood, and we drivers think it only right that we should get all we can out of them. Here's your money, sir," he went on, returning the five-dollar bill. "I won't charge you anything for that drive."

"Of course he expected the detective to hand him back, if not all, at least a portion of it, but in this he was disappointed. Thad concluded to take him at his word, by way of punishment.

"Very well" he said, putting the bill into his pocket. "I am not in the habit of allowing myself to be driven for nothing, but under the circumstances I shall accept this, as it may serve to teach you a lesson. The next time you overcharge a man, find out first who your man is."

The fellow made no response, and tipping his hat, drove off.

Meanwhile Kate had made her way to the house, and was having some difficulty to convince Mrs. Shelby that she was not a tramp instead of the young woman who had been carried off a few days before.

As soon as the detective made his appearance, however, everything was explained, and the two were admitted.

They were both nearly famished, as well as worn out for want of sleep, and the terrible ordeal through which they had passed, but the old woman soon had them a good breakfast ready, which they sat down to with a good deal of relish.

After the girl had resumed her feminine apparel, and they had related the account of their strange adventures to the old woman, plans for the future were discussed.

"I do not know that you will be safe here," observed Thad. "Those fellows having found you here once, will be most likely to come here again for you."

"Leave that to me," interposed Mrs. Shelby. "They will never get into this house again as long as I am able to use a pistol, and I think I can use one pretty well yet."

"Do you think you will feel satisfied to remain here?" he asked of the girl.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "There is no place where I would feel as secure as here. And when it comes to using a pistol, I guess I can do something in that line myself."

"Yes, as this night's adventure proved," supplemented Thad.

"We did do some pretty good work, didn't we?" she laughed.

"First class. I could have done no better myself. So be it, then, you remain here for the present, and I will go. But before going, I wish to have a word with you in private, Miss Berwick."

Without a word, she arose and led the way into the next room, which was the one from which Thad had seen the man carrying her on that night of the abduction.

She looked a little alarmed when he closed the door and locked it, but was soon reassured by the kindly smile he gave her as he took his seat.

"See here, Mr. Burr," she commenced, "for I know now that that is your name, and that you are a detective—won't you tell me whether you suspect me of complicity in the murder or not? For I believe you do, and are going to ask me a whole lot of horrid questions about it."

"Why should I suspect you?" he asked by way of reply.

"I don't know, but it seems to me you do."

"I would be less likely if you did not continue to accuse yourself, Miss Berwick," he rejoined coldly.

"I don't accuse myself, Mr. Burr. I have told you that I had nothing to do with it."

"So you have, but that signifies nothing. Why do you continue to allude to the subject?"

"Because you act as if you suspected me of something, and I do not know what else it could be."

"No, I suspect you of nothing, and shall

acquit you entirely if you will tell me all you know about the affair."

"I do not know anything about it, except what—"

She paused, and the detective helped her out.

"Except what Leonard told you, eh?"

"Yes, and what I read in the papers."

"But you told me a little while ago that you had not seen Leonard for a long time. How could he have told you about it, if you had not seen him?"

"Well, he has written me about it."

"Have you those letters?"

"No, sir, I destroyed them," she returned, blushing, and growing a little confused.

"Why did you destroy them?"

"I did not want any one to see them, for fear they would think I had something to do with the murder."

"The letters were of a compromising nature, then?"

"I do not understand you."

"They showed a familiarity with the subject of the murder on the part of the writer, and contained matter which might have led the reader to suspect that you also possessed a guilty knowledge, did they?"

"I don't know that they did, although something might have been made out of them."

"Can you recall the contents or the purport of the contents of any of the letters?"

"I don't believe I can."

"Try."

She reflected for some time, and finally said:

"It is useless. I have such a poor memory. I can't recall a single sentence."

"But you must remember the substance of some of them."

"No, I cannot even do that."

"Well, did you infer from the tone of the letters that Leonard had anything to do with the murder?"

"No, I do not think so."

"Did it appear that he knew who did it?"

"I thought he hinted that he did."

"How did he express himself? Did he appear to be sorry that the young woman was dead, or did he appear to be glad or relieved that it was over?"

"He always said that it was too bad, but I did not infer that he was very much grief-stricken over the affair."

"You remember my speaking to you about a letter which was dated the 17th, as we came along?"

"Yes."

"You remember I told you that Leonard denied having intended that letter for you, and claimed that the date had been changed?"

"I remember you speaking about it, yes."

"Now, charge your memory, please. When did you receive that letter—on what date?"

"I don't remember."

"Was it on the day it was written, or the next day?"

"I cannot remember."

"Well, was it in the morning or in the evening?"

"I don't even recall that."

"Now listen. The letter was directed to this number, and the old lady says she has no knowledge of your receiving a letter while you stopped here, therefore you must have met the postman at the door and taken the letter without her knowledge."

"Possibly I did."

"Well, would not that circumstance be sufficient to impress the date, or at least the time of day at which you received it?"

"It might if—"

"Your memory was not so bad, eh?" interrupted the detective. "Did you receive any other letters in that way?"

"Yes, I believe I did."

"Then you did not want the old lady to know that you were receiving letters, I take it?"

"No, I would rather she would not—she is such a gossip, she would ask me a thousand questions about them, if she had known I was getting letters."

"That is reasonable enough, but there is another thing I would like you to explain."

"What is that?"

"The murder of Katherine Stern occurred on the 15th, and Leonard Stern is supposed to have gone to Chicago on the same date.

If he did, he reached there on the afternoon of the 16th. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir."

"On the evening of the 16th his father telegraphed him the news of the murder and requested him to come home. Remember, this was the evening of the 16th. He telegraphed back immediately—showing that he had reached Chicago—that he would come on immediately. He appears to have done so, for he reached home on the next afternoon—late. This was the 17th, the date on which that letter is supposed to have been written. It is not impossible that he may have written you that very night, and if he did, you would have received it the following morning. Now how long had you been here before you received that letter?"

"Two or three days; I don't remember exactly."

"And you can't remember whether it was in the morning or in the afternoon?"

"I think it must have been in the morning."

"You are not sure?"

"Yes, come to think of it, I am pretty sure it was in the morning."

"And you are quite sure that you did not see Leonard during this time?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Did you receive a package from him any time after the murder?"

"No—nothing except letters."

"He sent you the locket in a letter, then, did he?"

This was a home thrust.

The girl grew pale and red by turns, and was so confused that she was unable to reply, and kept her eyes on the floor, while her lips twitched nervously.

"You must have received the locket some time during that period," pursued the detective, relentlessly. "How did you get it?"

She made a desperate effort to make some sort of reply, but failed. Her lips continued to twitch painfully and her bosom to heave, and finally she broke down and began to sob.

"Don't ask me that," she pleaded piteously. "Please don't. I cannot tell you—I must not!"

"Where is the locket at present?" He persisted mercilessly.

"I do not know, sir."

"But you promised to get it for me, if I would wait till to-day."

"Yes, I know, and I will. You should have had it by this time if they hadn't carried me off. You shall have it this afternoon."

"Very well. I will give you till then, but don't disappoint me, or I won't be responsible for my actions."

"You shall have it then, without fail."

"At any rate, there is no reason why you cannot tell me now where and how you came in possession of the locket."

"No, no, I cannot!" she sobbed. "Don't ask me now, please."

"Will you tell me when I come again?"

"Maybe."

"There must be no maybe about it," he retorted sternly. "I must know, or I shall have to take measures to make you tell. This would be very painful to me, but I must do my duty."

"Then you believe I had something to do with the murder?" she cried, sobbing afresh.

"You will drive me to believe it pretty soon, if you continue to allude to the subject and refuse to tell me what I want to know."

"But, sir, I am innocent," she cried, weeping piteously. "Indeed, I am. I had no motive for killing the woman, and wouldn't have done it if I had. It seems everybody wants to persecute me! I haven't a friend in the world, and now you, who thought enough of me to rescue me from those ruffians, have nothing for me but torture. I wish to God that I were dead!"

"It is the last thing that I would think of doing—torturing an innocent and defenseless girl, my poor child," said the kind-hearted detective, in a soothing voice. "You have no better friend than I am. But I have a duty to perform. God knows that I would rather believe you innocent, and will do everything in my power to prove you so. But you must help me."

He paused for a reply, but she made none and continued to sob, and he continued:

"You blame me for believing you guilty. As a matter of fact, I do not believe you guilty, but you have continued to refer to the subject of the murder in such a manner as to lead me to believe, in spite of myself, that you possess some knowledge of the affair."

"I do not, sir," she interrupted, hysterically.

"Another thing," he pursued, disregarding her remark, "you persistently refuse to tell me about yourself. I am anxious to know who you are and where you belong. If you have any friends, tell me who they are and where they are, and I will soon settle the question of your innocence or guilt. These letters are all addressed to Katherine Sherwood. How came you to adopt that name?"

"I have no friends—no home!" she wailed. "Everybody hates me and wants to persecute me."

"But you can at least tell me who you are?"

"I have already told you that."

"You have told me that your name is Katherine Berwick, but you told the old lady here that your name was Stern. You also told her that you had been married to a man by the name of Stern. What am I to think?"

She only sobbed and made no response.

"Another circumstance that makes it bad for you is your strong resemblance to the murdered woman, and the fact that she had a cousin who was in the habit of persecuting her. For aught I know to the contrary, you are the cousin."

"No, no, I am not!" she cried firmly, raising her eyes to his for the first time since she began to weep. "I am not she, and I can prove it, sir."

"Very well, I shall be happy to have you do so, and to tell me who you really are."

"I will."

"Well?"

"When you come this afternoon."

"Very well," he said, rising. "I will give you till then. Good-by."

When he got out into the other room he took the old woman to one side and said:

"Keep an eye on that girl, and do not let her leave here!"

CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPEARED.

Burr went home, and after a little rest, made his toilet and called upon Leonard Stern again.

While his visit was ostensibly to call upon him, it was partly for the purpose of having his sister accompany him to identify Miss Berwick, whom he suspected of being the late Kate Stern's cousin.

However, while he was here, he concluded to begin his visit with a talk with Leonard.

"Well, what progress?" he asked, as soon as the detective entered the room.

"Not much progress," was the reply, "but a good deal of adventure. By the way, I have seen and had another talk with that girl."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And she still persists in saying that she knows you, that she has received letters from you within the past week, and that you have intimated to her in some of your letters that you knew a good deal about the murder of your step-mother."

Leonard's eyes flashed angrily as he retorted:

"She is an infamous liar, then, whoever she is!"

Thad laughed.

"That is substantially what she says of you, Mr. Stern," he observed. "She alleges most firmly that the date of the letter I showed you has not been changed, and that it was written at the time the date indicates it was."

"Well, this beats all the mysteries I ever heard of!" he exclaimed. "I pledge my word as a gentleman that I never saw the girl to my knowledge in my life, and certainly never had any correspondence with her. Does she claim that she has seen me lately?"

"No, she says that she has not seen you for a long time—she does not say how long—and has received all the information she possesses through correspondence with you."

What astonishes me, is the fact of her intimate knowledge of matters that would seem inaccessible to any except members of your own family, and her possession of the locket, which is known to have been in possession of your step-mother when she left home."

"Does she claim that I gave her that?"

"No, she won't say where she obtained that."

"Why did you not take it from her?"

"She claimed that she did not have it, but promises to give it to me, as well as tell me where she obtained it, when I call this afternoon."

"Did she show you any of the letters alleged to have been written by me in which I intimate that I know a good deal about Kate's murder?"

"No, she claims to have destroyed them."

"Ah, I expected as much! If she had received them she would have kept them, you may be sure."

"Her excuse for destroying them is that there were things in them that might be interpreted to mean that she possessed a guilty knowledge of the murder. She also led me to infer that you and she had been on extremely affectionate terms at one time. She says that you once quarreled, but afterward made it up."

"You astonish me more and more, sir!" the young man exclaimed with an expression of consternation. "I should like to know who the woman is. What did she say her name is?"

"Katherine Berwick."

"The same name as the young man whom you saw here the other night. I wonder if she is any relation to him."

"She claims not. However, that is probably not her right name, for she told the old woman where she is stopping that she had been married to a man by the name of Stern, and all the letters in her possession are directed to Katherine Sherwood."

"So far as they are concerned," interposed the young man, "they are all Kate's letters. I know the one you showed me was. And when the truth is known, I guess you will find that she has stolen these letters, and probably the locket also, from Kate's cabinet."

"For what purpose, do you imagine?"

"I have no idea, but she doubtless has some scheme on foot. Possibly the two men—Berwick and Hulsted—could tell something about it, if they were so inclined."

"I was inclined to think the same thing at first, but that theory is knocked in the head by a circumstance that happened last night."

"What was that?"

"She was stopping at a place in Fourteenth street, near Third avenue, whither these same men had carried her after abducting her from the house in which I first found her, and when these men called upon her, she refused to see them."

"All for a blind, maybe."

"That is what I thought at first, but listen. Later in the evening—about midnight, in fact—they again carried her off—"

"By force, of course?" sneered the young man.

"As to that, I cannot say, but at any rate, they took her away from there, and took her to a flat among a lot of ruffians, in Avenue A. I followed, not knowing exactly where I was going, and by the merest chance happened to pass the carriage in which she was sitting while her captors were in the flat, and she threw me a note, asking me to rescue her."

Here the young man broke forth in a hearty laugh.

"She wrote the note while you waited, I suppose?" he sneered.

"No, she appeared to have had it already written, for she would not have had time to write it while I was standing there, which was not to exceed half a minute."

"Does not that show you that the whole thing was a sham to throw you off your guard?"

"I did think so at the time. But wait till I tell you what happened next."

Thad then went on to relate the account of the exciting incidents which took place after he got inside the tenement-house, and resulted in the ultimate rescue of the girl.

"You are sure it was your pistol she used?"

said the young man at the conclusion, in a skeptical tone.

"Yes, I know it was my pistol," retorted Thad sharply.

"Because," pursued the other, "I did not know but she might have fired blank cartridges."

"No, sir, there was no sham about it. The men whom she shot were really wounded."

"Did you see any blood?"

"N—no, I cannot say that I did, but it was not a time for playing at shooting, besides, my pistols were loaded with balls, and whoever stood in front of them when they were fired, got hurt, you may depend upon it."

"However, when you came out of the flat the second time, as you say you did, and came over the same ground, you did not see any dead bodies lying round, did you?"

Thad was a trifle put out.

He was partly angered by the young man's flippancy, and astonished that he should have thought of a matter which he had completely overlooked in his excitement.

Now that he thought of it, there was no dead body in the hall when he emerged the second time from the flat, and he could not remember of noticing any blood.

He was more than half angry with himself that he should have allowed so important a thing to escape him, and more than angry with the astute young man for calling his attention to it now when it was all over, and he was compelled to resort to something he had never done before, a subterfuge, to cover up his own dereliction.

"It does not follow," he said, "that because the girl shot him, she killed him or even mortally wounded him, and his friends had ample time in which to remove him while we were up-stairs. As for blood, it was too dark in the hall to have seen it if there had been ever so much, and in our haste to get out of the place we had no time to think of such a thing anyway."

Leonard affected to believe that the skirmish had been a sincere affair, but Thad could not fail to see that he did not, and he finally left him with a sense of defeat and a feeling of resentment such as he had never entertained for the man before, and he registered a mental resolution that if there was the least show of tracing the murder to him he would do it, if it took the remainder of his life.

He took his leave politely, however, and Leonard was extremely polite throughout.

He then asked for Josephine, and found that she was expecting him, and ready to go with him.

A carriage was called, and, as they rode along Burr asked:

"How long has it been since you saw this young woman, Miss Stern?"

"Oh, it has been six months, I guess," she replied. "It was just before papa and Kate were married."

"There will be no question about your recognizing her, I presume, though?"

"None, unless she has greatly changed."

"Did she resemble your late step-mother?"

"Very much."

"Then, I have no doubt that this is the woman, although she denies any relationship with Mrs. Stern."

"What name does this woman go by?"

"Katherine Berwick."

"What!" ejaculated Josephine in astonishment.

"That is the name she gave me, although she told the old lady with whom she is stopping that her name was Stern. At least she said that she had been married to a man named Stern."

"Just like her impudence! Well, I guess there is no doubt about it being Kate Berwick. Everything corresponds so well, even to her impudence."

"Was this young woman given to fabricating?"

"Gracious! I should think she was! You couldn't believe a word she told you!"

"Another point of resemblance," laughed the detective. "Now, there is another question I would like to ask you, Miss Stern?"

"What is that?"

"You remember the day we looked through the drawer in the secret cabinet we left it open."

"Yes."

"I know this, for your brother and I went to it and found it open two days afterward. Now, do you suppose there is anybody about the house who would have been likely to have gone in there and taken anything out of the drawer?"

"I do not believe so. Why?"

"The reason I ask, is because this young woman was in possession of a lot of letters which I have reason to believe once belonged to Miss Sherwood. Indeed, they are all directed to her, but at the house in Thirteenth street where we are going."

"Then she has stolen them, but how she managed to do it, is more than I can tell."

"Might not she have bribed some of the servants to steal the letters out for her?"

"That is very likely. Servants are rarely above accepting bribes. But brother tells me that she has the locket papa gave Kate on her last birthday. I wonder how she got that?"

"That is another thing I want to speak to you about. The letters might have been stolen any time since the drawer was opened, but, as I understand it, the locket was on your step-mother's neck at the time she left home, and must have been stolen from her person."

"That is true."

"You are sure that she had the locket on when she went away, are you, Miss Stern?"

"Oh, yes, for I remember asking her if she was going to wear it, and she said she was. I asked her if she wasn't afraid of having some bad luck, and she only laughed, and said she was looking for just such bad luck as that thing would bring her."

"She did not believe in its fatal propensities, then?"

"Certainly not. Neither did I. It was a foolish superstition held by some of the family, but the younger portion only laughed at the notion."

By this time the carriage had arrived at the number and pulled up in front of Mrs. Shelby's house in Thirteenth street.

It was late in the afternoon and nobody was in sight, which gave Josephine the impression that the place was deserted, but when Burr knocked a moment later the door was opened by Mrs. Shelby herself.

The detective could see at a glance that something had gone wrong, and it was with an ominous wag of the head that the old woman led the way into the little sitting-room and closed the door after her.

And that was the reason that Thad hastened to ask:

"What news, Mrs. Shelby?"

"Bad enough, Mr. Burr," she replied with a doleful shake of the head. "The gal's gone."

"Gone?" he exclaimed in horror. "How did that happen?"

"Bless my soul! I'll never tell you. She remained in the room after you went for a long time—till I got lunch ready, in fact, and then I went to tell her to come in, and I found her sitting there crying as if her heart would break. I felt sorry for the poor critter, and tried to soothe her, but she persisted in saying that nobody cared for her, that she hadn't a friend in the world and everybody wanted to persecute her, and she wished she was dead. Finally I got her to come out, though, and drink a cup of tea, although she wouldn't eat anything, and after while she sort of cheered up a little, and when she went back to her room I heard her singing. So I think she is all right now. A little while after I had to go to the corner to order some groceries and told her that I was going out, and that if anybody knocked at the door not to answer. Because I didn't know but those men might come back, you know. Well, I thought everything would be all right till I came back, and went out."

"I wasn't gone more than half an hour, and when I got back the house was so still like that I thought there might be something wrong, so I went to her room, when lo and behold! there was nobody there! I thought she might have gone up-stairs for something, and went up there, but she was nowhere to be found. At length I came down again and went into her room, and then I noticed this note on her table."

She handed the detective a small bit of paper, folded still smaller.

Upon opening it he found that it contained only a few words, written in pencil, and were as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. SHELBY:—

"When you come back you will find me gone. I hated to leave you, for you have been very kind to me, but I could not stay. That detective will be here this afternoon, and I cannot, will not see him again. Tell him for me that he need not look for me, as I am going where no mortal will ever find me. Good-by. You will never see me again."

"Your persecuted friend,

"KATE."

"What do you think of that?" inquired the old woman as soon as the detective raised his eyes from the paper.

"Well, I think she has gone, for one thing, and that she had an urgent reason for going, for another. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion is that she has gone and done away with herself," responded the old woman, earnestly. "She acted just like lots of girls I have seen in my time, when they were about to commit suicide."

Meanwhile Thad had handed the letter to Josephine.

"What do you think of it, Miss Stern?" he asked.

"If the woman is Kate Berwick," she replied, looking up with a scornful expression, "she has done nothing of the kind. And, what is more, I believe all her actions have been for the sole purpose of gaining notoriety. I never saw such a creature for notoriety. She would do anything to gain it, and it made no difference to her how unsavory it was, so she got her name in the papers."

"There may be a good deal of truth in your theory, Miss Stern."

CHAPTER XX.

A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK.

Burr left the house in company with Miss Stern, a little more discouraged than he had ever been after following a case for the same length of time, and he was compelled to confess to himself that he did not know where to begin again.

There was little conversation between him and Josephine on the way to her home, whither he conducted her in the carriage.

"I am sorry to have brought you down here for nothing, Miss Stern," he apologized.

"But as you saw, it was no fault of mine."

"Certainly not. You could not help it, and I have no doubt you will soon find this woman, and then I shall accompany you anywhere and identify her."

"I hope I may, but as it looks now, the case is rather doubtful. So long as I knew where to look for her there was no difficulty, but in her desire to get away from me she will probably go somewhere where I will never be able to find her. It is like looking for a needle in a haystack, hunting for anybody in this city, unless you have some clue to his whereabouts."

"True enough, but I do not imagine that she will try to keep out of your way, unless she is really guilty of the murder and fears arrest. However, I do not believe she is guilty. She would like to have people think so, for awhile, till she gets a good deal of notoriety over it, and then she will try to prove herself innocent. And, unless she thinks she has tempted fate as far as it is safe, she will in all probability seek you, if you do not find her."

"I hope so, but I have very little faith in your theory, Miss Stern, I am sorry to say. By the way, when you go home, will you please question the servants and see if you can learn anything concerning the stolen letters?"

"With pleasure. Indeed, I was thinking of doing that anyway."

As soon as he had put Josephine down at her home, Burr drove directly to Lily Dare's boarding-house in Fifteenth street, and was obliged to introduce himself to the landlady, and then she was a little skeptical of his personality in his present guise. She had only seen him in his disguise, and did not recognize him in his natural condition.

"Now I know you are a detective," she cried, when he had finally convinced her that he was the same party who called the previous day. "I thought as much be-

fore, but now that I see you can make yourself up to represent any one you like, I know you are a detective."

"Mightn't I be an actor?" he laughed. "Actors are capable of doing some wonderful things with their faces."

"Yes, I know; but only for the stage. You would know they were made up if you saw them on the street. But you can make up so that your own mother wouldn't know you."

"That is a compliment, I must say. But I came to talk about something else."

"To inquire about that giddy woman, eh? Well, she hasn't been back since."

"I am sorry for that."

"Didn't you succeed in finding her last night?"

"Yes, I found her, risking my life in rescuing her from a mob of ruffians, and now she has given me the slip again."

"Abducted this time?"

"No; she went off on her own account, this time."

"Just as she did before."

"You don't believe she was abducted before, then?"

"No more than I was! Let me tell you, that woman is as bad as they make them. She is either playing some deep game, or working for notoriety. I have seen so many of them have themselves abducted for the purpose of getting their names in the papers, and she is one of them, mark my words."

Thad could not help but think of the similarity of her opinion and that of Josephine Stern, but said nothing.

"Have you seen anything of the two men who went off with her, Miss Dare?" he asked.

"Not a sign. Still, they are liable to come round any time. What they did, even if they had carried off the girl, would not deter them from coming round. They would laugh at the very idea of abducting that baggage. Or, if they thought the thing worth while, would consider it a good joke."

Burr reflected some moments, and then resumed:

"Miss Dare do you want to do me a favor?"

"I am just dying to," she answered. "Especially if you make it worth while, as you did yesterday."

"I'll make it worth more than that to you if you do what I am going to ask you."

"What is that?"

Thad handed her a card with his name and address on it.

"If those fellows come here again, manage to entertain them for awhile—don't spare the expense—and let me know at that address. If we catch them, I will reward you handsomely."

"That's all right," she said lightly.

The detective then went home and made himself up as a very tough-looking tramp.

It was now about eight o'clock in the evening, dark and dreary, and a cold, misty rain falling—just the kind of an evening for the genus crook to be abroad.

So he sauntered down in the direction of Avenue A, in the neighborhood of the tenement-house where he had been the night before.

The place was as dark and dismal as usual, and a little more repellent from the fact that the crowd of villainous-looking characters that swarmed on the stoop and about the curb in fine weather, were compelled to congregate in the hallways.

The front door was open and he shuffled in past the repulsive crowd without molestation or so much as attracting their attention, and climbed the dirty stairs.

When he reached the third landing he could hear loud talking in old Bare-Bones's flat, and guessed that he and his cronies were having another jollification. And this led him to believe that they had got the girl back.

Of course, he knew that if they had, she had gone there of her own accord, and he did not contemplate any attempt at rescue. However, he was anxious to know whether she was there or not, and also to know whether Berwick and Hulsted were there.

Ascending to the upper floor, where the vacant flat was, he found the door broken from the hinges just as the mob had left it the night previous, and, entering, walked to the back window.

Here he discovered that the box which he had thrown down the fire-escape steps was still in its place, blocking all passage by way of the ladder.

His first concern, therefore, was to remove the box, which was no trifling task, as it had become wedged in between the iron railings by the mob in their efforts to get it out the night before, but by patient effort, coupled with almost superhuman tugging, he finally succeeded in getting it out of its place. He left it on the balcony, though, so that it would be convenient in case he might require it to block the way again.

He then climbed down the ladder, and tried the window. To his surprise, the tenants had not taken the trouble to lock it since he had unlatched it the previous night, and he raised the sash and stepped inside.

The door leading into the front room was not ajar this time, and the rear rooms were consequently as dark as a cellar, and he glided cautiously and noiselessly into the front bedroom and put his ear to the door.

He was not long in distinguishing the voices, and ascertained that both the doctor and Berwick were present. If the girl was there, she was maintaining the utmost silence, but from the tone of the conversation, he inferred that she was not there.

"Never mind," he heard the doctor say, at the conclusion of a long harangue by one of the others, "we can get along now without the wench. We've got the screws on Leonard and we can work the old man through him as well as through her. So let her go."

"Where do you suppose she went?" asked Berwick.

"God only knows," rejoined the doctor, "and I don't care. She evidently went off with that detective, and is either back at old Mrs. Shelby's or at Lil's."

"No, she ain't at neither place," growled old Bare-Bones. "Me an' Jim found out from one o' the servants that she wa'n't at Lil's, an' nen we went to Shelby's an' seen her leavin' thar, an' we watched the house till dark an' she never come back no more."

"You saw her leave the house?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Yas."

"And didn't follow her to see where she went?"

"Nor stop her?" added Berwick.

"Neither one was possible."

"Wasn't possible?" growled the doctor. "Why?"

"W'y, ye see, thar was a copper in the way to keep us from nallin' her, an' she only walked to the first corner an' tuck a hack."

"And I suppose you could not have taken another hack or some other conveyance, and followed her?" said Berwick savagely.

"No. I looked about fer one, but thar wasn't none in sight, and afore I could find one she was gone."

"Well, you are a pretty set, I must say!" snorted Berwick.

"However, as I said," interposed the doctor, "it makes little difference now. We have got Leonard Stern where he can't wiggle, and the thing can be accomplished as well without her."

"W'en's it ter be done?" inquired old Bare-Bones meekly.

"To-night," replied Hulsted sternly. "Everything is in readiness, and there is no need of deferring matters any longer. In fact, the longer it is put off the worse are our chances of success. The old man is not there to-night, and so will not give us trouble, and we can soon convince Leonard that he had better not stand in our way. What we have done for him is worth a good deal more than what we will get, anyway, as we can soon persuade him."

"You two fellers'll go in for the swag, I reckon," observed old Bare-Bones.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "just that very thing."

"W'at d'ye want me an' Jimmy to do?"

"I don't know yet. You go along, and we will find something for you to do. You will follow my instructions, or not go, you understand?"

"Yep," acquiesced Bare-Bones. "I only said—"

"I know what you said, and what you want," interrupted the other. "But if you

want any part in this affair, you will do as I say!"

That appeared to end the controversy, and everybody became silent. It could easily be seen from this that the doctor was master, and that these ruffians, reckless as they were, were under his control.

But what was their plot for the night?

It appeared that they were about to commit some outrage upon Mr. Stern—probably robbery; but, what did they mean by saying that they had Leonard in their power? Had they committed some crime for him, and now they were about to demand their reward by compelling him to allow them to rob his father?

That was the only inference Thad could draw from their late remarks, and if that was their intention, it was his duty to interfere. But, in order to do so, he must get there ahead of them, and he could hear that they were already making preparations to go, so he had no time to lose.

"Are we all ready?" he heard the doctor ask.

"Yes," replied Berwick.

"It seems mighty early for this kind of a robbery," objected Bare-Bones.

"This is not going to be the usual kind of a robbery," exclaimed Hulsted. "Ordinarily when a thing of this kind is to be done we go at two or three o'clock in the morning and make our entrance with skeleton keys or a jimmy, but we are going to do a gentlemanly act to-night. We will enter the house as guests of the host, and do our work right before his eyes, and he will offer no protest."

"Oh, thunder!" growled Bare-Bones. "That's no way o' workin'. No skeleton-keys, no jimmys? Kah! I wouldn't give a cent fer such a lark!"

"Well, you needn't go," rejoined the doctor, dryly. "As I said before, if you want to have a hand in this thing, you have got to obey orders."

The other was silent, and, concluding that the controversy was at an end and they were about to leave the place, Thad was about to slip out the back way, when the door suddenly opened and old Bare-Bones stepped into the room.

He had left the door wide open, and the detective stood disclosed in the glare of the light that streamed in from the front room.

The ruffian stopped and surveyed him in astonishment for a full minute before he could regain his breath, which appeared to have been taken away by the unexpected sight.

Meanwhile Thad was thinking fast, and by the time the old man had found his tongue he had formulated a plan of action.

Beginning to reel about and look hazy out of his eyes, he muttered, in a thick voice:

"I zay, ole top, got anysing to' drink in z'ouse. I'm dry'n powzer 'ouse."

This had the effect of completely disarming the old man of any suspicion, and he commenced laughing.

"Dry, air ye?" he laughed. "Wal, I reckon we kin find a drop o' suthin' fer ye. Ye look ez if ye'd been havin' a good deal lately."

"Thasso, but y' see I've jes gos out, an' had make up fer loss time."

"Just got out? W'ere they hev ye? On the Island?"

"Ncpe, Zin-Zin."

"Sing-Sing, eh? W'at was yer charge?"

"Murzer."

"Murder? Wal, come in hiar an' git er nip. But how did ye git in hiar, anyway?"

"Found door unlocked, 'nd jes walked in an' went sleep."

This was a hazardous assertion, but luckily it went all right, for it happened that before Berwick and the doctor came Bare-Bones had gone out to get some whisky, and left the door unlocked so that they could get in in case they came before he returned.

When he got into the other room, however, the doctor and Berwick did not view him so favorably.

Looking at him suspiciously, the doctor said:

"Where did that tramp come from?"

"Been ersleep in t'other room," Bare-Bones replied.

"Are you sure he hasn't been listening to what we were saying?"

"Him? He couldn't listen to nothin'."

"Don't be too sure of that. I'll bet fifty dollars he's a detective, and I'll find out before he leaves this room!"

With that he whipped out a revolver and stuck it into Thad's face and ordered him to throw up his hands.

CHAPTER XXI.

NIPPED IN THE BUD.

THINGS looked a trifle dark for Thad for a moment.

With a cocked revolver under his nose and a pair of vicious eyes glaring into his and thirsting for blood, it was not a cheerful prospect.

Most men would have weakened on the spot.

But the detective had been through too many such episodes to lose his presence of mind or become in the least nervous.

He knew that open resistance was useless, and he must resort to stratagem.

Leering at the furious doctor with a maudlin grin, he muttered:

"Was masser? Goin' shoot er feller 'cause 'e (hic) wan's drink? All right, shoot 'way."

With that he staggered up to the table and picked up a bottle that was standing there and raised it half-way to his lips. Then he turned unsteadily toward the irate doctor again, and hiccupped:

"Ere's fun, ole top! Lesser go Gallagher! Shoot, an' don't wait!"

And he raised the bottle to his lips and pretended to drink, meanwhile watching the doctor's movements out of the corner of his eye.

Hulsted was somewhat disarmed of suspicion, but was not quite satisfied yet, and made a movement toward the detective.

The latter affected not to notice him, but kept his eye upon him, and when the doctor came very near and attempted to grasp him by the throat, he suddenly let fly with the bottle, striking the doctor between the eyes, and sending him reeling to the floor.

Then quickly pulling both his revolvers, he sprang into the door and covered the other three men.

They were taken completely by surprise and panic-stricken. Had he been so disposed, he could have taken them all in as easily as if there had been but one, but he was not ready for that yet.

He believed the proposed robbery was a sequel of the murder of Kate Stern, and that by allowing it to proceed there was a chance of solving that terrible mystery.

The men stood staring at the late tramp with bewildered countenances, and the doctor, partially recovered from the blow he had received on the head, scrambled slowly and painfully to his feet.

"I've a great mind to bore the lot of you," said the detective with a contemptuous sneer. "If you were worth it, I would, but I don't like to fight children, and so I'll let you go this time. Good-evening!"

And putting his pistols into his pockets, he sauntered down the stairs and into the street.

"I wonder if they will have the audacity to attempt this thing to-night, after this?" he mused as he walked along. "I'm afraid not, and a great deal depends on their carrying out the plot or attempting to do it. But I am afraid that, knowing in reason that I overheard their conversation, they will postpone it. At all events, I will call upon Leonard and have a talk with him. Perhaps he will not be so flippant this time."

A little further along he saw the same cab he had employed the night before, and hailed it. The driver was about to ignore him, thinking he was a tramp, when Thad reminded him of his former experience and he pulled up very quickly.

"I wonder how many disguises that detective has," growled the cabman, as Burr climbed in.

Thad had himself driven home and, while the cab waited for him, made a complete change in his make-up, or rather assumed his natural personality again, and dressed in a natty suit of clothes, stepped forth and took his seat in the vehicle.

Twenty minutes later he rung the Sterns' bell and was admitted to the house and shown into the drawing-room.

It wanted but a few minutes of ten, but he was soon joined by Leonard.

"I am a frequent visitor, Mr. Stern," remarked the detective as the young man entered the drawing-room.

"No more frequent than welcome," rejoined the other with mock politeness.

Indeed, the irony in the tone of his voice and the sneer that curled his lip, Thad could not fail to notice, were even more pronounced than when he had seen him earlier in the evening.

It appeared as if he had got rid of a load that had been weighing upon him, and felt like sneering at everything of a sincere nature.

"I have important news for you, Mr. Stern," began Burr, choking down a desire to throttle him on the spot.

"Yes?" drawled the other languidly, his lip curling a degree more contemptuously. "What, pray?"

And the young man threw himself back languidly and lit a cigar.

Again the detective had some difficulty in swallowing his passion, but he maintained his coolness with an effort, and responded:

"There is a plot on foot to rob you, or rather your father, this very night!"

"Indeed?"

And Leonard blew out a long whiff of smoke as a mark of disdain.

"The robbery is not going to be of the ordinary kind," pursued the detective, affecting not to notice the other's conduct. "The burglars intend to break no locks or shed any blood."

"How remarkable. Also, how considerate!"

"Yes, they are considerate," rejoined Burr, replying to him directly for the first time. "And why shouldn't they be? They are your friends."

"My friends?"

The young man was awake now, and a tinge of color had mounted to his cheek.

"I have your word for it, sir, and they recognize you as a stanch friend."

"Who are they, sir?"

"Hulsted and Berwick!"

"They are no friends of mine, sir," retorted Leonard hotly, rising from his chair and standing over the detective. "I explained to you that they had been introduced to me as gentlemen, and that I had unwittingly mistaken them for such, but that as soon as you informed me that they were not honorable men, I was done with them."

"Nevertheless, you have had some dealings with them, of a nature that you are not particularly proud of, and they hold you in their power at this moment. They will come into your house, or rather the house of your father, claim your friendship, and you will not dare to treat them discourteously. Am I not right?"

"It is a lie, sir! An infamous lie! They will not dare to come here and claim my friendship, nor come here at all!"

"Not so fast, my young friend," said Thad coolly. "Don't be too sure of your premises, nor imagine that you are talking to a novice. I have been a detective too long and a student of human nature too long to be deceived in appearances. Besides, I have probed this case to the core, and am about ready to act. Do you imagine that I did not understand your flippancy when speaking of the episode last night? Do you suppose that I did not understand your motive in making light of the shooting and the genuineness of the girl's heroism? You saw that that I was dangerously close to the truth, and thought to dampen my ardor by throwing cold water on the whole transaction."

"I tell you, sir, that you are mistaken!" cried the young man, with an effort at his former dramatic fire, but it was a failure. Thad's coolness had already begun to have its effect and his courage was failing.

"And I tell you I am not mistaken," retorted Burr calmly. "I have learned a good deal within the last twenty-four hours. I admitted the plausibility of the date in the letter having been altered, but a good deal of what the girl has told me must be true. She could have learned it from no one but yourself. Again, in spite of your persistent denial of an acquaintance with her, I can prove that you called at a boarding-house in Fifteenth street, where she

was stopping, to see her, but she refused to see you. The girl herself, although a terrible liar as I have had reason to believe, has acted honorably for the most part. She confessed, unintentionally, that you had imparted knowledge to her regarding the murder which no innocent person could have possessed, and yet she would openly confess nothing. Indeed, her whole attitude was that of a person trying to shield another. She admitted having the locket, but refused to tell, where she got it, and ran away rather than fulfill her promise of telling me. She destroyed letters from you for the ostensible purpose of warding suspicion from herself, but as a matter of fact, to shield you."

The young man had resumed his chair and fallen into a state of dogged indifference.

"It is all a lie!" he growled sullenly.

"A trumped up tissue of lies, manufactured for the purpose of ruining me. I cannot imagine how you, as a detective, can entertain these foolish stories for an instant after having proven to your own satisfaction that I was on my way to Chicago at the time this thing occurred. When the test comes, I have no fear but that I will come out ahead. The *alibi* will do the business!" he cried triumphantly, in conclusion.

"I hope it may. But what about these men?"

"I know and care nothing about them."

"But they have some hold upon you. What is it?"

"I deny that they have any hold upon me."

"This night will prove it. However, I may as well tell you that I have just heard them in secret counsel, and they appeared to be well satisfied that you would not dare to resist them when they came to rob your father, and they also mentioned the fact that they had performed certain work for you which was a great deal more valuable to you than all they would get by the robbery. What have you to say to that?"

"I have nothing to say, sir," replied Leonard sullenly. "I do not hold myself responsible for the vaporings and swagger of ruffians and thieves. If you choose to go among such cattle and listen to their cant and then put any store by it, that is no affair of mine. But when you attempt to induce me to confess that it has any significance so far as I am concerned you are wasting your time. I denounce the whole story as a lie, an infamous lie! I never—"

At this juncture the door-bell rung and the young man paused, turned pale, and finally sprung to his feet.

He was greatly confused, and appeared at a loss what to do.

And then he turned peremptorily upon the detective and said:

"I do not care to discuss this matter any further, sir. You are at liberty to take your leave as soon as you like!"

And, without another word, started to walk out of the room.

But just as he reached the door, and before he had put his hand upon the knob, the door flew open, and Berwick and Hulsted stood before him!

Leonard was speechless and stood staring at them like a statue.

The doctor, who was in the lead, and was scrupulously attired as if he was making a formal call upon a lady, smiled blandly and put out his hand.

"Good-evening, Leonard," he said in a bland voice. "I hope I see you well."

Leonard glanced timidly back to where he had left the detective, but to his surprise, he was no longer there.

The moment the door had opened Thad took the opportunity of the confusion that followed to conceal himself behind the *portieres* cutting off the drawing room from the next apartment, and was ready to watch what was to follow.

Leonard, with a face as white as that of a ghost, turned again to his visitor and whispered:

"Not here! For God's sake, not here! If you do, I am ruined! Let us go up-stairs to my study!"

"Oh, that is not necessary," replied the doctor, smiling sweetly. "What little business we have to transact can as readily be done here."

So saying, he strode into the drawing-room and calmly threw himself into an arm-chair.

Berwick stole in after him, also wearing a smile, and Thad could see that he was also attired in the latest fashion, so that the call to a casual observer might easily have been mistaken for one of the most formal character.

"We are happy to find you alone, Leonard, dear boy," observed the doctor, still in his suavest tone. "It might have been awkward otherwise. Our business, as you may imagine, is such that it might not be pleasant for you to have your friends—I beg your pardon, we are your friends—I mean, your other friends, to hear the nature of it."

Leonard strode toward him quickly and hung over him nervously and looking imploringly down at him, cried:

"Not here, doctor! For God's sake, do not speak of it here! We are not alone!"

"Not alone?" and the doctor sprang to his feet. "What do you mean?"

Leonard pointed toward the curtain.

"There!" he cried. "Behind that curtain is—"

"Who?" interrupted the doctor, with a scared face.

"A detective!" gasped Leonard.

"The devil! Then he has heard too much already! What is he doing there, anyway?"

"He has just been in conversation with me here," explained the young man in a trembling voice.

"In conversation with you? What about?"

"He is the detective employed by father to ferret out the mystery of the murder of—"

"I know," interposed the doctor, impatiently. "Has he referred to us in any way?"

Leonard was silent for a moment, and then summoning all the courage he possessed, he replied:

"Yes, he has overheard you in conversation about the affair and knows all."

This was a master-stroke on the young man's part. The old villain grew ghastly with terror and began to tremble violently.

Berwick was the only one who appeared to retain his self-possession, and still smiled.

"Well, suppose he does know all, Doc?" said Berwick, rising and approaching the other two in a calm manner.

"It will only serve to expedite our affairs. The fact is, Leonard, we have come for our reward, and the quicker you give it to us, the better it will be for you. The diamonds were to be the reward, weren't they, Doc?"

The doctor turned upon him with a black scowl, at the same time putting his hand in the neighborhood of his hip-pocket in a menacing manner.

But Berwick, treating the matter as lightly as if the gentleman had been in the act of taking out his handkerchief, still smiled, and remarked:

"No, Doc, I wouldn't do that if I were you. It might cause a disturbance. Remember we are in a private house and have come on a social call, and the use of firearms might disturb the serenity of things."

At the same time, as he concluded his speech, he drew his own revolver and pushed it under the already terrified doctor's nose.

There was a painful silence for several seconds; then Berwick resumed:

"I say, Leonard, my boy, will trouble you to fetch out the diamonds, and don't be long about it, as time presses. You needn't be particular about selecting any special ones. We will take them all. Your sister's, your mamma's and those of your poor outcast brother, all go."

As he uttered the words 'outcast brother,' Thad was struck with two things! First, the remarkable resemblance in face, expression and tone of voice he bore to Leonard Stern; and second, to the tone of pathos he threw in the words, as if he bore great sympathy for the poor outcast brother.

"Well, what are you standing there for?" demanded Berwick in a sterner voice than he had yet employed. "We are waiting on your actions. Hurry!"

With head bent, Leonard left the room.

It was not until then that the doctor recovered from the stupor into which the young man's strange and unaccountable conduct had thrown him.

"My God, man! what are you about to do?" he gasped. "Have you suddenly lost your senses?"

"Oh, no," rejoined Berwick calmly. "I was never more sane in my life. You planned a novel robbery, and was about to weaken. I, on the other hand, was determined not only to carry it out in all its details, but to add a little novelty and spice to it. That's all."

"But did not Leonard tell you that there was a detective watching us?"

"That is nothing. I am sorry for the detective, but he has got to get used to such sights, although it will be tough on his morals."

At that moment the door opened and Josephine burst into the room.

"Why, Harper! my brother!" she cried, and threw herself into Berwick's arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE REVELATION.

So far from evincing any surprise at the young lady's action, or at being addressed as Harper and "brother," Berwick took it all, as he had everything, with perfect coolness and as a matter of course.

He returned the young lady's caresses, and appeared to enjoy the novelty of being mistaken for a long-lost brother; all of which was the occasion of a good deal of astonishment on the part of the doctor, who stood with staring eyes and open mouth, watching the unexpected scene.

What passed between the two as they stood folded in each other's arms, no one but themselves knew, for they spoke in whispers, but there appeared to be a good deal of mutual enjoyment in it.

And then, when this thing had been going on for the space of a full minute, the door opened again, and in came Leonard, bearing a casket containing all the household jewels.

At the sight of his sister in the burglar's arms, the young man stopped, turned deathly pale, and allowed the casket to drop from his nerveless fingers to the floor.

"Wh—what does this mean?" he gasped at last.

"It means that I have found my brother!" replied Josephine, "the only one who has always been good and kind to me."

Leonard's eyes flashed fire.

He was unable to speak for a few seconds, and appeared to be trying to swallow something that was coming up in his throat.

At length he found his tongue, and spoke in a hoarse, unnatural voice, as if something were choking him.

"You are making a mistake, sister," he said. "That man is not your brother. He is an outlaw, a thief, and a murderer! He is in this house at this very moment for the purpose of robbing us."

For some reason Josephine did not spring away from the thief, nor did he lose his calmness.

On the contrary, she clung to him more closely than before, and he smiled more benignantly.

Then came his calm, unimpassioned voice:

"Yes, I am an outlaw—at least in your eyes, although I never stole anything in my life; I am a thief by the same judgment. A murderer I might have been if I had followed your advice and done your bidding; and we are in this house, as you say, for the purpose of robbery. But, let me ask you by whose invitation we are here?"

Thad watched Leonard's countenance, and expected to see him weaken and confess all, but, to his surprise, the young man suddenly pulled himself together, assumed the sneering smile he had worn while talking with the detective earlier in the evening, and replied:

"This is a pretty story, or insinuation, Mr. Paul Berwick. You will get a good many people to believe that I invited you here to rob me; and as for your character—"

"It will stand the test with yours, any day," interrupted Berwick, hotly. "If you did not invite us here, why did you bring the casket of jewels down?"

And he pointed to the casket on the floor. Josephine, who espied it for the first time, ran and picked it up and opened it quickly.

"Yes," she cried, "here are all the family jewels. Mine, mamma's, yours, Norman's—but not Leonard's!" she suddenly ejaculated, looking up at him. "What does this mean?" she demanded.

"It means that this man whom you have

just claimed as your brother, compelled me on the pain of death, to bring the casket to him that he and his pal there might carry them off."

"If that is true," she demanded, "how is it that yours are not here, Leonard?"

"I don't know," he replied doggedly. "I suppose they happened to be out of the casket when I picked it up. I was greatly agitated at the time."

But his attempt at bravado failed and his countenance fell under the searching gaze of his sister's honest eyes.

"I understand it all," interposed Josephine. "You were driven to act by the fear of having your crime exposed, but thought you would only sacrifice the rest of the family's jewels and save your own. It is in part with your conduct when you robbed papa and turned it upon poor Harper and had him driven from home."

"I never did!" he cried vehemently, suddenly regaining his courage. "And I am astonished to hear you uphold that thief and renegade, sister!"

"Hold on!" cried Berwick. "That is the second time I have been called a thief by you, sir! Do not dare to repeat it, or I shall not be responsible for what I do!"

"Do you mean to deny that you robbed father four years ago—?"

"Hold on!" again cried Berwick. "You said just now that I was not the renegade brother, that my name was Paul Berwick."

"That is the name you have been known by among your outlaw pals," growled Leonard.

"Oh, then you admit that I once was your brother?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I did not know but you would want to deny that I ever had been, after all my career of crime."

"I should do so, by rights. But you are my brother no longer."

"How about your own crimes?"

"I am guilty of none."

"Be careful. There was a witness, remember."

Leonard laughed.

"A poor lunatic. What will his word be taken for?"

"He is a lunatic no longer. But, you were saying that I robbed father?"

"You cannot deny that."

"I do deny it!"

"Why were you driven away from home, then?"

"Through such false witnesses as yourself, who made my father believe that I was guilty of what you had done yourself."

"But there was another witness."

"Intimidated and misled into swearing falsely."

"You cannot prove that."

"I can and will readily prove it."

Leonard laughed again.

"Then you will bring her from the grave."

"That is not necessary. The witness is here to testify!"

The voice came from the direction of the door, and everybody looked in that direction, when, to their astonishment, as well as to Thad's, there stood Kate Berwick!

"I am here," she laughed, "and I did not have to come from the grave, either. Now, Mr. Leonard, what have you to say?"

He cast a sneering glance at her and muttered:

"I have nothing to say to you, except to ask what you are doing here."

"I am here by the right of the mistress of the house, sir. Is that satisfactory?"

"It is not, because you are not the mistress of the house or anything else. You are the woman who has been claiming to the detective that I was in correspondence with you."

"True enough. And every letter he has of mine were written by you to me, and you cannot deny it!"

Leonard turned and looked fully at her for the first time.

Then there was a radical change in his countenance; from the sneering smile, it suddenly changed to one of terror.

"For God's sake, who are you?" he demanded, in tremulous tones, while his knees began to smite together and his face became the color of chalk.

"My name was once Kate Sherwood!" she answered; "but, for some time past it has been Mrs. Katherine Stern. I have the

honor of being your respected step-mother, whom you thought you had murdered! Look at me! Do I look natural to you, or do I look like a ghost?"

After another long stare, his face assumed the sneering expression again, and he replied:

"Neither. You are Kate Berwick, the adventuress."

"What say you, Josephine?" she asked, approaching the girl and putting her arm about her waist.

"I say that what you have said is true," rejoined Josephine, embracing her. "You are our own Kate—our little step-mother."

"Wh—who was the other one, then?" gasped Leonard, becoming terrified again.

"The one you murdered?" asked Kate.

"I did not kill her," he declared in a pleading tone. "As God is my witness, I did not! Bring all your witnesses, bring your lunatic, who you say is no longer a lunatic, and they will swear that it was not I. I was in Chicago at the time, as the detective will testify!"

"I don't know so well about that," observed Thad, stepping out from behind the curtains. "I know you were in Chicago on the day after the murder, and that you left here some time during the afternoon of the day of the murder, but there are so many complications about this affair, and the evidence points so directly to you from so many different standpoints, that I will be compelled to act in the same manner as if I knew you to be guilty."

"In other words, arrest him, eh, Mr. Baker?" laughed Kate.

"Yes. Painful as it is to me, I am compelled to do my duty."

And without another word he put the handcuffs on Leonard's wrists.

He had no more than completed the operation, when, glancing toward the door, he saw Hulsted trying to sneak out.

"One moment, doctor," he called. "Don't be in a hurry. Wait a minute, and you shall have company."

"What do you want with me?" he demanded, sullenly.

"We'll explain that later on. In the mean time, suffice it to say that I want you."

And before the doctor was aware of it, Thad had the irons on him, also.

It was not until that moment that Josephine appeared to realize the situation; then she broke down and began to weep piteously.

"It is awful!" she cried. "Guilty as he is, it is a terrible thing to see him dragged off to jail."

"And yet it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for his devilish scheming," growled Leonard, who had become completely changed within the last few minutes.

The look of bravado was all gone now, and he was the most completely cowed criminal the detective had ever looked upon.

"Hurry them away!" admonished Harper (the late Berwick) "before father comes. It will break his heart to see his favorite son in chains."

"Yes, I will go at once," replied Thad. "Come, my worthies, let us be moving."

He stepped to the door and opened it preparatory to taking his prisoners out, when, to the surprise and consternation of all, the old gentleman stood before them.

He had just entered the house and was about to open the drawing-room door, when the detective anticipated him.

Mr. Stern stared at the unusual assemblage in his parlor, but he did not realize the situation for a few seconds.

His eyes wandered from face to face, and at length lighted on that of Leonard, his favorite son; then, somehow, they dropped from the face to the hands, and he saw the handcuffs.

His face grew ashen; he tottered and came very near falling.

"Leonard, my boy! What does this mean?" he cried, in a voice of mingled consternation and grief.

Leonard assumed his old expression which the father had mistaken for innocence all his life, and shrugging his shoulders, nodded in the direction of Harper.

The old man's countenance and bearing underwent a sudden and radical change.

The expression of sorrow gave way to one

of hatred and malignance, and he ground his teeth as he muttered:

"What! That scoundrel in my house? I'll—"

"Father!" interposed Josephine, "wait until you have heard the truth before you drive brother forth again. You have falsely accused him long enough. He never was guilty of the crime laid to him; it was the man who now stands in chains who did it all, and screened himself behind an innocent man."

"Who says so?" almost shrieked the old man, in a towering rage.

"I, for one, father," replied Josephine, bravely.

"You know nothing about it, child. It all happened while you were asleep. If Kate were here, she would tell a different story."

"No, she wouldn't," replied Kate, herself, stepping forward.

"What, you—? My God!"

The old man staggered back and would have fallen if the detective had not supported him.

His face was white, his eyes almost burst from their sockets, and his lips twitched like one in terrible agony.

"No, no, it cannot be!" he cried. "Certainly not. It is an imposition! A base imposition! Ah, I know now. It is Kate Berwick! Get out of my house, you hussy! How dare you accuse my boy?"

"Be calm, Mr. Stern," entreated Thad, whispering in his ear. "What they have told you is every word true. I have investigated the thing to the fullest extent; there is not the shadow of a doubt of the guilt of Leonard, while your other son is positively innocent of the crime for which you expelled him from your house and heart."

"It is a lie!" shouted the old man, waxing more furious instead of calming down. "It is all a trumped up lie to ruin my son. I will believe none of you!"

"Oh, thank you, father!" cried Leonard, coming forward and grasping his hands with his own shackled ones. "It is all a conspiracy to ruin you and me. They know that you love me, and for that reason, they are determined to crush me! But, they cannot do it, father. You know I am innocent—that I can prove that I was out of the city at the time of the murder, and I will come out triumphant in the end."

"I know it, I know it, my boy!" avowed the old man, wringing his hand, while the tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks. "They are a lot of base conspirators, and we shall have the pack of them in jail before long. And as for you, sir!" he went on, turning upon Thad savagely, "I command you to remove those handcuffs, under penalty!"

He did not state what the penalty was, and the detective only smiled.

"I am sorry, sir," replied Burr, "but I am compelled to refuse to do your bidding. This man is a murderer, and would have been a robber, as well, if I had not intercepted his plot."

"A robber, sir?" roared the old man. "What do you mean?"

Josephine raised the jewel-case, which she had set upon the table, and explained:

"This, father. He was about to deliver this over to his confederate, there, but Mr. Burr, having overheard the plot of the would-be robbers, came here and prevented the robbery."

This was not quite accurate, but it was as she understood it.

Mr. Stern looked a little bewildered.

The mass of evidence against his favorite was so great, that he was beginning to weaken, but in his despair he stole a glance at that favorite, and Leonard rewarded him with such a look of injured innocence, that his doubt fled like frost under the sun's rays, and he said:

"It is not true, is it, my boy? It is not true, is it?"

"Of course not, father," replied the dutiful son. "How could you suspect me of such a thing for an instant?"

"I cannot, my boy; I cannot, and I will not! You never told me a lie in your life, and I will take your word in preference to all the rest."

"Well, my dear, sir," interposed the de-

tective, impatiently, "I cannot help what you believe. I have my duty to perform, and must do it. I know your son to be a felon: I have a warrant for his arrest, and, what is better, the irons on him; so come along my young friend," he went on, turning to the prisoner. "We have wasted too much time already."

The detective began pushing his prisoners toward the door, but the old man sprung between them and the door like a tiger.

"You shall not take my son to prison!" he screamed. "I will die first! I know that he is innocent, and you shall not take him! My precious boy!"

"My dear sir," interposed the detective sternly, "you must get out of the way, or I shall have to take you along to. You are interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty."

"Arrest me! Arrest me then!" yelled the man frantically. "If my boy is to go, I want to go with him. We will occupy the same cell."

"Excuse me; you won't occupy the same cell, if I take you down. Your son will go into one cell and you into another."

That appeared to dampen his ardor a little, and he drew back, but a moment later he re-entered the parlor and began to berate the rest of the family.

"You, Josephine, and you, Harper!" he cried, "get out of my house this instant! And as for you, Miss Kate Berwick, get to the dogs! and never enter my house again! Do you hear?"

Meanwhile Thad had managed to get his prisoners out to the street, called a hack and had them driven to the central station where he locked them up.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TERRIBLE STORY.

TAKING the hint from what he had heard Harper Stern say about the lunatic being no longer a lunatic, Burr called at the hospital early the following forenoon, and was astonished to find that the poor fellow had recovered so completely as to be considered cured, and had left the hospital.

He had remembered the detective, however, and left his name and address for him.

His name was Wood, and he lived in West Park avenue, and from the location Thad judged him to be a man of means.

He lost no time in calling upon the gentleman, whom he found to be a bachelor, occupying chambers in an aristocratic lodging-house, which accounted for the fact that he was left in the hospital so long without recognition.

As soon as the detective sent up his card he was told to come right up, and the gentleman received him with great warmth and cordiality.

"I was just thinking of you to-day," he observed, "and wondering if you would remember me."

"How could I forget you?" rejoined Thad.

"True, it was part of your business to remember me, I suppose," laughed Wood. "I did not know that you were a detective until the day I left the hospital. I could recall your face, and remembered that you asked me a great many questions, but I could not imagine why you should have done so at first. Then it occurred to me that you were trying to discover how I received my injuries, and thought you must be a detective. So on the last day of my stay I asked the doctor if you were not a detective, and he said you were. Then I said it was very kind of you to try to discover how I came by my injuries, and he took me down a peg by telling me that it was not on my account you were making the inquiries at all, but for the purpose of discovering the murderer of a young woman who was killed on the same occasion."

"Yes, that was my principal object in questioning you, but I also desired, if possible, to find out how you received your injuries."

"Then I was not vain for nothing after all."

"Not at all. You say you recall my face, Mr. Wood?"

"Yes, I would have known you anywhere."

"Do you recall anything that I asked you?"

"Yes, a few things, but it is all very vague. My memory appeared to retain only what I saw. What I heard passed away like the things we see and hear in a dream."

"You must remember the man who came with me on one occasion?"

"The man with the black eyes?"

"Yes."

"I remember his face distinctly, especially the eyes; but it was not the first time I had seen him, as in your own case. Let me see, he was there twice, wasn't he?"

"No. That is, he was at the hospital but once, but he approached your cot-side and went away and then came back the second time."

"I knew there was something of that kind."

"Where did you see this man before?"

"At Riverside Drive."

"Was it he who struck you over the head and caused your temporary dementia?"

"Yes, he was the man."

"What were the circumstances?"

"It was a little before five o'clock in the afternoon. I was taking a drive with a female acquaintance. We had both been indulging in a good deal of wine and consequently felt pretty lively. As we approached the lower end of the Park, or to be more explicit, about Eighty-third street, my companion saw some one she knew standing by the roadside and hailed him in rather a boisterous manner."

"I was about to reprove her for it, when the man called out to her to stop, as he wished to speak to her, and she asked me to stop the carriage."

"I did as requested, as she said it was a cousin of hers. The man approached the side of the carriage, and called her by name, or rather by a name, for it was not hers, and, at the sound of it, she burst out in a boisterous fit of laughter."

"It then occurred to me that the man had made a mistake, which would have been easy, as she had kept her veil down, but the fellow appeared to grow very angry and began to upbraid her."

"One thing I heard him say was, 'This is a nice way to treat me, after refusing to come out to meet me, and then come with another man. What do you suppose father will say when I tell him?'"

"At this the girl laughed more boisterously than before, and told me to drive on, and 'leave the fool,' as she put it. I touched the horses with the whip and they started. That appeared to render the man furious. He sprang at the horse's bits, uttered an oath and said: 'No you don't! You shall not leave me like that. I must have a talk with you before I go, for this will be the last time I shall ever see you!'"

"The girl screamed with laughter at this, and declared that the fellow was as crazy as a bedbug, and for me to drive on and leave him."

"Accordingly I again touched the team, when he again jumped and grasped the leader by the bits. I yelled at him to get out of the way, or I should drive over him, but he still clung on, and I gave the horses a sharp cut with the whip."

"It was a spirited team, and between the whipping and the fellow hanging on at the bit, they became unruly and started to run. I controlled them for awhile and they were kept in the road, but we had not gone far when we met another team and I was compelled to turn out for it. Then I lost control of my span. They whirled abruptly around and started up over the rocks in the direction of the precipice there."

"They had caught the bits in their teeth so that I could not hold them in check, and still dashed on toward the precipice. It all happened in a moment."

"I saw that in another second we would go over the rocks and be dashed to pieces, and, just in the nick of time, I jumped out, grasped one of the horses by the bridle and did what I had often heard would stop a horse when everything else failed; I shot him."

"The ball did not kill the horse, but it had the desired effect, for the team stopped as suddenly as if they had been paralyzed, and were thrown back on their haunches."

"Meanwhile I had paid no attention to either the girl or the man with whom she had had the words, so now that the danger

was over, I glanced back at the carriage, when, what was my astonishment, to see the man stepping out of the carriage."

"I did not know what to make of it, and before I had time to recover from my surprise, with the girl in his arms he sprang out of the vehicle."

"The girl screamed, and I naturally sprang to her rescue. The man was a powerful fellow, and we had a lively tussle for some moments, but I finally got in one with my fist that laid him out for an instant, but he was upon his feet in a moment, and rushed upon me like a mad bull."

"The girl, thinking to prevent another collision, ran between him and me, when he caught her and hurled her over the cliff; then he rushed upon me with a club he had picked up and gave me the blow over the head that laid me out."

"That is all I know about it. The next thing I remember is being in the hospital, and I do not know how long I had been there."

"You do not know what became of the girl?"

"I have heard since that she was found hanging on the point of one of the rocks, was taken to the hospital, and there died. But the name given was not correct."

"What was the girl's name?"

"Kate Berwick."

"And the name of the woman found?"

"Mrs. Katherine Stern, I believe."

"Yes, that was the name. Do you know how the mistake occurred?"

"I cannot explain that."

"You were not acquainted with Mrs. Stern, then?"

"No, sir; never knew her."

"Well, Mrs. Stern was a cousin of the woman you were with, Kate Berwick. Were you on intimate terms with this woman, Mr. Wood?"

"Yes."

"Then you knew something of her affairs?"

"Something, I guess."

"Did you notice that she had an umbrella marked 'Kate Sherwood' and a handkerchief marked 'Mrs. O. Stern'?"

"I remember the umbrella, but I do not the handkerchief. Though she might have had a dozen marked that way and I would not have noticed it."

"Did she ever tell you where she got the umbrella?"

"Yes; she said it was given to her by some relative, who was married and very rich. As a matter of fact, I did not credit the story, as Kate was an awful story-teller, so I supposed she had stolen it, somewhere."

"Which is as likely as anything else. But, there is one thing else I want to ask you. You say you shot the horse. Were you going armed at the time?"

"No, not particularly."

"But you had that pistol?"

"Yes, of course."

"How was it you did not use it in self-defense when the fellow came at you with the club?"

"I didn't have it then."

"What had become of it?"

"When I shot the horse the pistol slipped out of my hand and dropped over the bluff."

"Would you know the pistol if you saw it again?"

"I think I would."

Thad drew out the pistol he had found under the cliff.

"Is that it?" he asked.

Wood took the weapon and looked it over carefully, and finally the detective saw him examine the stock; then he looked up with a smile of confidence, and replied:

"Yes, this is it."

"You notice the initials on the stock, 'L. E. S.', don't you?"

"Yes."

"What do they stand for?"

"I'm blest if I know. The fact is, the pistol belonged to Kate, and I suppose the initials were those of some of her former sweethearts, or they might have stood for a name she had formerly gone by."

"Well, I guess I can enlighten you upon that subject. Those initials are those of a man whom I arrested last night for the murder of the girl."

"What is his name?"

"Leonard Stern."

"Leonard? By Jove, I remember that name! That's what she called the man we saw at the side of the road, the man who threw her over the cliff and struck me over the head."

"Well, that is the chap I have in jail. Do you think you would recognize him?"

"Recognize him? Yes, anywhere, especially the eyes."

"What was there about the eyes that impressed you so?"

"I don't know, except that that was the last thing I remember after he hit me, or rather before he struck me. He came at me with those eyes staring like those of a tiger, and the first thing that appeared to me after I began to recover my senses was those eyes."

"Another thing: did this woman wear a locket on her neck?"

"It seems to me she did."

"Do you recall what it was like?"

"Yes; it was just a plain little locket of no particular design."

"Do you know what became of the locket?"

"I do not."

"It was gone when the body was found."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and I was trying to trace up the clue to the murder by another locket, one of a peculiar design."

"What was it like?"

"It had a coat of arms on one side, and on the other the words, 'The Fatal Charm.'"

"By George! since you speak of it, I remember she *did* have that same kind of a locket. She had been down town and said she met a cousin, I think, and this cousin gave it to her. She told me that everybody who had ever worn the locket had come to some terrible end. I told her she had better not wear it, then, and she said she would—that she wanted to 'croak,' and that she would wear it that afternoon, and see what the result would be."

"Well, she found out, or rather she helped you to find out?"

"Yes."

"But you have no idea what became of it?"

"No."

"That is a great mystery. The chain was found about her neck, but the locket was gone. It cannot be that Leonard snatched it off?"

"I did not see him do it. But, I was too much excited then to notice anything."

"Now, I have got a pretty strong case against this fellow, but there is one point in his favor."

"What is that?"

"He was in Chicago the next afternoon at seven o'clock!"

"Indeed? Well, he could have left here after this thing occurred, and reached Chicago by seven the next day. The Through Express makes it in twenty-four hours, and if he left here at five, that would just make it."

"But, you must make an allowance of over an hour for the difference in time between here and Chicago. So he would have to leave here at four to reach there at seven, Chicago time. You say it was about five when this thing occurred?"

"Yes, about that time."

"By Jove! the fellow has a fighting chance for his life yet! It is one of the greatest mysteries I have ever run across. By the way, I would like to have you go down to the Tombs with me and see if you can identify this fellow."

"With pleasure."

A few moments later they took a carriage and drove down town to the Tombs.

Thad requested the warden—Mr. Fallon—to show him to young Stern's cell, and after passing through a labyrinth of corridors, finally arrived in a long corridor in the New Prison, lined with cells on both sides and three stories high.

In the center of this corridor was a desk which served to divide the corridor in two sections. The south end is known as "Murderers' Row," because the cells at that end are reserved for prisoners who have been condemned to die. The north end of the corridor is appropriated for prisoners awaiting trial for murder, and here is where the callers found Leonard Stern.

He was sitting on the side of his cot reading a newspaper when they approached the grated door, and it was not till Thad spoke to him that he looked up.

He scowled darkly and muttered some untelligible imprecation, and was about to devote himself to his paper again, when his eye caught the face of Wood.

Instantly a change came over the murderer.

His eyes were opened staringly; his cheeks grew ashen, and he arose and approached the grating as though he had been impelled there by some powerful charm.

"Do you know this gentleman, Mr. Stern?" asked the detective.

Leonard made no reply, but continued to stare, as if fascinated.

"Is this the man, Mr. Wood?" asked Thad, addressing the other.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it," replied Wood. "I would know him any place under the sun, especially those eyes. Uh!" he shuddered, "they make my skin creep to look at them. Let us go."

"Pretty soon. I want to ask him a few questions. Don't you remember this man, Stern?" he repeated.

Still the prisoner made no response.

"Don't you recall the afternoon when you saw him driving with Kate along Riverside Drive, and you hailed them and wanted to speak to her? And then, when they attempted to drive on you tried to stop the team? And don't you recollect of having a fight with this man, of his knocking you down, of your regaining your feet and starting for him, when Kate ran between you and you caught her and hurled her over the bluff, and then struck this man down with a club?"

"Uh!" he groaned, and covered his face with his hands. "No, no, I never saw him before!" he cried desperately. "It was a dream, a horrid nightmare! I never saw him in my waking moments!"

And turning away, he threw himself on his cot and covered his face.

"You are sure this is the man, are you, Mr. Wood?" repeated Thad, as they left the prison.

"Oh, yes; I am sure of it. It is impossible that I should be mistaken. Besides, don't his own actions show you that he is guilty?"

"His actions are certainly very strange, and your story has been very straight forward, and tallies pretty well with the other evidence I have gleaned, but there are two points which still puzzle me."

"What are they?"

"One is the fact of his being in Chicago, which I spoke to you about, and the other is in regard to the team. Did you go to the livery stable and get the team yourself?"

"I did."

"And it came from a stable on Forty-second street, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, the man who claims that he let the team identified Stern as the man who hired the team. I took Stern down there, and the fellow was so sure of it that he told Stern to his face that he was the man."

"What did Stern say?"

"He told him that he was the most remarkable liar he had ever met."

"And so he might, for I hired that team myself."

"Well, as we are down this way, suppose we stop on our way back and see if the fellow will recognize you."

"Very well."

When they reached Forty-second street, the detective had the cabman drive past the livery stable and he and Wood got out and went in.

Michael Dolan was called for, and when he came forward Thad said:

"Mike, do you remember this gentleman?"

Mike looked at him for some moments and finally replied:

"Yis, sor; that's the gentleman that hoired the team that come back wid wan of the horses shot in the jaw."

"But you told me the other day that the gentleman who was with me then was the man."

As soon as Burr mentioned the other man, and described him, Mike remembered him, and thought, after all, that he was the man. But, when he came to look at Wood again,

he was equally as sure that it was he who had taken the team out. And then, when he came to be cross-questioned, he became confused and could not for the life of him recall which one it was, but he remembered that they had both been there.

Under the circumstances, as he knew them, Thad did not believe that Leonard had been there at all, and attributed the stableman's assertion to that effect to a lapse of memory, or worse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

UPON taking leave of Wood, the detective made one more call upon the Sterns.

It was with some trepidation that he awaited the answer to the bell after the manner in which he had quitted the house on the previous evening, and when the attendant came he gave him his card and asked for Miss Josephine Stern.

Instead of showing him into the drawing-room, the attendant asked him to step into the young lady's private parlor.

"I had you come in here, Mr. Burr," she explained, "because papa has not yet become reconciled to the facts, and in the event of his coming in and finding you in the drawing-room, he might make it unpleasant for you."

"I appreciate your precaution," he responded, "but I hope we shall soon be able to convince him that we are in the right."

"I fear it will take a long time and an overwhelming mass of evidence to do it. Papa is so terribly set in his opinions; and besides, Leonard was such a favorite, that it will take something like a miracle to convince him that he is incapable of doing anything wrong."

"Did he make much of a scene last night after I left?"

"Oh, yes, he fumed about a good deal, but finally left us to ourselves."

"Did your step-mother and Harper remain in the house?"

"Yes. After he went to his room we knew that he would not trouble us again that night, and I persuaded them to remain."

"Are they still here?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I call them?"

"If you please. There are some things to be cleared up yet, which nobody but they can explain."

"Excuse me a moment and I will call them down."

She left the room, and, a few minutes after, returned, accompanied by Mrs. Stern and Harper Stern.

After shaking hands with the detective, they were all seated, and Thad began the conversation with the remark addressed to Kate:

"When I saw you at Mrs. Shelby's yesterday I did not expect to see you here today, Mrs. Stern."

"I presume not," she replied. "And I should not have been had it not been for brother, here. I met him after leaving Mrs. Shelby's, and he advised me to come home and put myself under the protection of Josephine. He then told me of the contemplated robbery, which he had concocted for the purpose of entrapping Leonard."

"Will you please explain to me what your motive for leaving home was, Mrs. Stern, and why you remained in hiding all this time, allowing it to be believed that you were dead?"

"Yes, certainly. You see, I had been engaged to Leonard and we had a quarrel. In fact, I never did love him very much. He was so deceitful. So after I married Mr. Stern, Leonard went West, but after a while he got to writing to me, and because I did not answer his letters, he began writing threatening letters. This was very annoying, but I bore it patiently, but when he came on here he annoyed me almost to death."

"In what way?" interposed the detective.

"Oh, in various ways. One was continually upbraiding me for jilting him, and another was trying to persuade me to elope with him. At length I received the letter asking me to meet him at Riverside Drive. I told him I would not, and in order to be rid of him for the remainder of his stay in New York, I went to Newburg."

"You really went there, did you?"

"Certainly. The next morning I read in the papers that I had been found dead on the rocks, and my first impression was that the report had been created by Leonard out of pure malice, because I refused to meet him, so I remained out of sight for a few days."

"At Newburg all the time?"

"No. As soon as I heard the report of my own death I came to the city, my first intention being to come home, but I changed my mind and decided to keep out of sight for a few days to see what the result would be, and went to Mrs. Shelby's."

"You did not go there till the next day after the murder, then?"

"I did not. The next day—the seventeenth, Harper arrived from Chicago, learned where I was, and wrote to me, but still laboring under the delusion that I was prejudiced against him and loved Leonard, thought to surprise me by writing the letter which you found at Mrs. Shelby's, signed 'Len,' imitating his hand so perfectly, that, as you told me, Leonard acknowledged it as his own, but claimed that the date had been changed."

"Did you believe the letter was from Leonard?"

"Yes, at first; but I soon received another from Harper explaining all."

"What was the idea of the sham abduction?"

"That was only half sham. Dr. Hulsted, who had known Leonard in Chicago, and whom Leonard knew to be a blackleg, was employed by him to watch me, under the impression that I was Kate Berwick, my cousin, and whom he hated with all the venom of his nature, lest I (Kate Berwick,) knowing a good deal about his real character, should betray him. Hulsted discovered my hiding-place through Leonard, and determined to carry me away where the detectives would not get at me, but before the design was put into execution, Harper accidentally met him, and through the merest chance, learned that he was in the employ of Leonard to do some sort of dirty work. So, pretending to be a rascal himself, Harper induced him to divulge the plot to him and take him in as partner. The abduction took place, and at Harper's suggestion I was taken to Miss Dare's, where he knew I would be safe. As soon as I was safely lodged there I rid myself of Hulsted's society by refusing to see anybody, Harper among the rest."

"Leonard called to see you while you were there, I believe?"

"Yes. Husted kept him posted as to my whereabouts, and he called once, but, as you know, I refused to see him. Then, it seems, Hulsted was instructed to take me some other place, where Leonard could see me, and he insisted upon taking me to the place where you found me. Harper was over-ruled in this matter, but believing that you would follow us, advised me to write the note which I handed you out of the carriage window. Leonard was by this time pretty well frightened. He knew he had committed murder and believed it was I whom he had killed, and Hulsted had him completely in his power. Then it was that Harper concocted the scheme of robbing the house of the family jewels, in which he would implicate Leonard. Leonard was consulted, and agreed to the proposition, and you know the result. Hulsted and Leonard were the only ones that were not privy to the real intent of the scheme. When the whole arrangements were completed, Josephine had me come up to the house, where she concealed me till the proper time, and she was ready to walk in upon the culprit in the nick of time to catch him in his rascality. You came very near spoiling our plans by arriving at the house at the time you did, and telling Leonard all about it—which of course, he knew before—but Harper managed to engineer the thing through all right."

"How did you get possession of the locket, Mrs. Stern? As I understand, it was in Miss Berwick's possession at the time of her death, and was torn from her neck. How did she get it?"

"There is something funny about that," pursued Kate, smiling. "I gave Kate the locket in the afternoon, after leaving the house. When Leonard went to throw Kate over the bluff the locket caught on a button

of his coat and was jerked off. When Leonard met Hulsted, an hour later, the locket was still hanging to his button, and he asked him what he was doing with it. Leonard was nearly frightened out of his wits for fear some one else had seen it and he would be identified as the murderer by it. So he took the trinket off and gave it to Hulsted, telling him to take it away and throw it into the river. Instead of doing that, however, he showed it to Harper, who recognized it at once, and asked him for it. Hulsted gave him the locket and he in turn gave it to me. I did not want to show it to you that day for fear you would trace this matter out before we were ready. You see, our idea was to bring the thing about in such a way as to convince Mr. Stern of Leonard's rascality, which we thought we could do by having him caught in the act of delivering the family jewels to burglars."

"But in that you were disappointed."

"So it seems. But he will be brought around in time, I hope."

"I hope so. But Leonard has a chance—an excellent chance of proving himself innocent."

"What?" they all exclaimed in chorus.

"He was in Chicago at seven o'clock on the afternoon of October 16th, the day after the murder. In order to have reached there by that time, he would have had to leave here not later than four o'clock on the afternoon of the 15th. Now, as the murder, by all accounts, could not have occurred earlier than five o'clock, it would have been impossible for him to have reached Chicago before eight."

"How do you know he was in Chicago by seven?" asked Harper, smiling.

"I have positive proof of it," replied the detective, bristling at the young man's skepticism.

"Have you?" asked the other, more sarcastically than before.

"I have, sir."

"What is it, pray?"

"This," replied Thad, handing him Leonard's telegram in answer to his father's, dated at seven-fifteen. "Does that prove nothing?"

"It proves nothing," replied the young man coolly.

"How do you make that out?"

The young man coolly handed him another telegram, or rather a filled-out blank, in Leonard's own handwriting. It read as follows:

"NEW YORK, October 15th, 1892.

"TO MR. HARRISON P. HIGGINSON,

"118 Monroe street, Chicago.

"DEAR HIG:—

"Telegram will arrive for me from my father some time to-morrow, telling of death, etc. I cannot get there before eight, maybe nine. Get telegram and answer about seven or seven-fifteen, as that is about time I would arrive if I had gone at the time I left father, four o'clock. LEONARD E. STERN."

The detective was dumfounded.

He was half angry with himself that he should have been taken in by so simple a trick, but when he came to consider that Leonard's conduct throughout had been so straightforward, he did not blame himself so much.

"What do you think of that?" cried the young man triumphantly.

"Well, he's subtler than I imagined, that is all," rejoined Thad, a little dryly. "But, how came you to think of such a thing?"

"Why he boasted so loudly to me of his ability to establish an *alibi*, that I thought I would see what I could do in the way of knocking his little scheme in the head. I went to Chicago the same day you did, and was in the Auditorium Hotel half an hour after you were. I found, the same as you did, that he had been there, but of course they could not tell exactly the time, but thought he had come in on the six-forty-five train. But, I was not satisfied, and went to the telegraph office. The operator is a particular friend of mine, and I asked him to show me the blank of the telegram sent to New York (the one you have there) and he handed it to me. Here it is. You see it is not Leonard's handwriting."

"That is true," assented the detective, examining the blank.

"Then I came on to New York," resumed the young man, and went directly to the

Western Union office and asked for this blank. The operator there is also a friend of mine, and he gave me the one I showed you before. So you see I am something of a detective myself."

"So you are, and I feel ashamed of myself that I did not think of that same thing."

"Oh, well, you had a thousand other things to think of, while my whole mind was on this one thing. That makes all the difference in the world."

"Yes, there is some excuse for me there. But, there is one more question I wish to ask you, Mrs. Stern," he went on, turning again to the lady. "This does not pertain particularly to the case in hand, but it is indirectly so."

"What is that?"

"Mr. Stern told me that you had discovered some dishonest dealings on the part of Harper here, and reported the matter to him; that you and he went over the books together and while you were at work upon them you saw Harper go to the room where the books were and alter them in such a way as to cover up his embezzlement. Is that true?"

All three laughed.

"That was another of Leonard's sharp tricks," answered Kate. "There was a shortage, but we could not discover whether it was Harper's or the head bookkeeper's, and he brought the books here for me to examine, as I was a pretty good accountant. While we were at work upon them, Leonard told Harper that we were purposely altering them so as to make out a case against him, and advised him to slip in and take a look at the books after we were gone. When he found that he had persuaded Harper to do so, he came to me and told me that Harper was going to alter the books while we were away, and for me to watch him. I did so, and found him looking over the books. He did not alter a figure or intend to, but the case looked bad for him, and as you saw last night, Mr. Stern is set in his ways and ideas, and there was no convincing him that Harper was not the thief, and so he was banished. We have all known differently a long time, but it was not until we could convict Leonard that he would be able to come back."

At that moment the front door was heard to open, and Josephine turned a little pale as she said:

"That is papa now!"

The next moment the old gentleman was heard calling his daughter, and she left the room to join him! A moment later the occupants of the room heard loud and angry talking in the hall, and finally the old man burst into the room in a towering rage, demanding in a savage voice:

"Where is it? I don't believe it! Where is it, I say? Let me see it!"

"Here it is, father," said Josephine, in a conciliating tone, coming forward and taking the telegram blank from the detective and handing it to her father. "You see, papa, it is in his own handwriting, and here is the one from Chicago, which was supposed to have been sent by him, which is not in his hand."

The old man examined the two documents which he held in his nervous fingers, and finally stormed:

"Still I do not believe it. It is a forgery, and the whole business is a conspiracy to ruin my son!"

"There is a way of proving that, sir," suggested Burr.

"How, sir?" demanded the old man, hotly.

"Two ways, in fact. First, we might take the blank supposed to have been written by your son and ask him if he wrote it. If he confessed, all well and good. That settles it. But, if he denies it, then we can summon the operator from Chicago, and have him testify, and also the very man who wrote this dispatch. He would hardly perjure himself."

"Very well, sir," snorted the old man, "we will go to the prison and see if my son will acknowledge writing that blank. I know he won't in advance, but I want to convince you. Come!"

Five minutes later the whole crowd took a carriage and were driven to the Tombs prison. Some delay was had before they received access to the felon's cell, but they finally reached it.

Leonard was sitting, as on the previous occasion of Thad's visit, on the side of his cot reading, and barely glanced up when his name was called, but as he did so, he caught sight of his father's face and arose slowly and approached the grated door.

"Here, my boy!" shouted the old man, thrusting the dispatch through the grating to him, "look at that! They say you wrote it. I know you did not! What have you to say?"

The instant the young man's eyes fell upon the paper, his face told the story without any word on his part.

His face grew ghastly white, his hand trembled so that he could scarcely hold the sheet, and it finally slipped from his nervous fingers and fluttered to the ground, as he covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"What!" roared the old man, "do you mean to acknowledge having written it, sir?"

"Yes, yes, father," groaned Leonard. "There is no use of denying it. That was the last ray of hope I had, and now that is shut out. There is no longer any use of trying to deny my guilt. It was I who murdered Kate!"

And reeling back to his cot, he fell headlong across it.

The poor old father had been spared the latter part of his confession, however, for as he pronounced the words 'Yes, yes,' the old man, the doting and long-deluded father, sunk back in a fit, and never recovered consciousness—a blessed relief to the terribly-deceived parent.

THE END.

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